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Illustration: Miwano Rag
Translation: MPT

I Hold Your
Voice
Alone,
Under The
Starry Sky



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"I see. I'm joining
the literature club,
so let's get on if you
do."

"...I'll keep it
in mind."

I still haven't forgotten
that soft and kind
smile. She didn't join
the literature club in
the end and I mostly
lost contact with her.
You could say that day
in first year was our
first and last link.

A dramatic anime-style illustration of a woman with long dark hair and blue eyes, wearing a flowing blue dress. She is captured in a dynamic pose, seemingly dancing or falling through a star-filled space. The background is a bright, glowing yellow light source, possibly a planet or star, with a rainbow-colored lens flare. A large, dark, metallic object, resembling a ship's hull, is visible on the right side.

"I... am on your
side."

No sooner had I
repeated the line,
tears welled from the
President's eyes.

“And...
thank you,
for walking
me home.”



“An acquaintance?
Whooo?”

Yagi Shuu

He can't write novels but is part of
the literature club. He ended up
somehow communicating with Eina
over a chat app.

“Eina, I'm
on your
side. Always
and forever.”

《What if I'm
dead after
five years?》

Minekawa
Yukino

She is in her second year at high
school and is both the student
council President and Shuu's
classmate. She usually takes an
unpleasant attitude with Shuu.

Ootaka Ruka

A third-year high school girl.
She's Shuu's senior in the
literature club and is in charge of
design work and illustrations.

Eina

A book-loving girl that somehow
ended up using a chat app to talk
with Shuu. Apparently she lives five
years in the past.



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Chapter 1 — Eina

Part 1

My phone buzzed quietly on the desk. I dropped my gaze to look at it and ‘You have a new message’ was displayed on the screen. It was a text chat or something from a social networking app. I tapped it and opened the message.

Eina: September 4th. The weather’s nice. I spilt some juice and stained the carpet. Crap, I gotta hide it...

Apparently, it had been sent by an ‘Eina’. I didn’t know the name. You could set your name to whatever you liked but I didn’t have any acquaintances that would use a refined name like that.

“A spam message huh?” I muttered quietly. That was sort of rare. Usually a spam message would be like. ‘You won ten billion yen! You can accept it here → ’ and dangle money in front of you. Or an account with a female name would send something along the lines of ‘I had fun at karaoke yesterday’, tempting you to reply before carefully persuading you to sign up to a dating site and pay ridiculous registration fees.

But what’s with that ‘September 4th. The weather’s nice’? Isn’t that something that you’d put in a diary?

Vzzzt.

A second message arrived while I was watching.

Eina: Cover up successful! Onee-chan didn't notice, hurray!

Again, it was just like a diary entry. What on earth do they want from me?

Eina: I found a stain removal technique on the internet! I'll try it tomorrow♪ Time to sleep, zzz.

A third message had arrived, and that marked the final one of the day. I should go to bed too, I decided, I had school tomorrow after all.

*

After school the next day, as usual, I was in the literature clubroom. The door was wide open so any potential applicants or sightseers could come in easily. It didn't seem like anyone would though.

There was nothing for me to do.

And then suddenly, I remembered the spam message from yesterday. I looked at my phone and there had been more messages from the same account. Three in all, and all during the evening.

Eina: Japanese, had a kanji test, easy marks♪

Eina: We ran in PE. I don't get why they've got to stick a rank on it. Can't they just let the people that finished feel happy that it's over?

Eina: I saw a clique fight between some girls in the entrance. I'm not part of any clique so I just walked away. I don't wanna get caught up in it.

I kind of get what position they're sending these from. First, they're a girl. Her avatar was a glass slipper like in *Cinderella*, and the name Eina seemed feminine as well. She was probably about middle school or high school as far as age went.

She was good at Japanese and poor in PE. She also wasn't in any clique, so she probably wasn't the type to group up.

In my head, I started to form a vague image of the girl called Eina.

At the same time, I considered what I didn't know. How tall was she? How long was her hair? Did she have monolids or double eyelids?

I wanted to see her reaction if I replied, but there was also a part of me calmly thinking that I couldn't reply.

I didn't know if she was actually a girl in the first place. It might be some old dude pretending. You heard about that kind of thing, old guys acting as women receptive to men.

I'd never heard of this kind of spam message though, so I couldn't help but get curious.

If I replied, I wonder how it'd go from there...

"Literature club, I'm coming in."

I looked up when I heard that. Someone I didn't expect was walking in, a girl from my year.

She was fair skinned, with a delicate nose and long, glossy hair. Her figure was superb as well. Her looks were good enough that she'd overshadow the word 'beautiful' itself.

Her name was Minekawa Yukino, the president of the student council at our school.

"President? This is rare, do we have an applicant maybe?"

I think my voice was rather excited. That wasn't at all because the president was a beauty though. The literature club was currently recruiting new members. It was September now so the recruitment was out of season, but our club hadn't had a single applicant since April, so we were still recruiting.

I was the only second year at the moment so our future was at risk. I'd be focusing on university exams before long so I'd have to leave too.

Of course, I'd decided that if we didn't get anyone new joining this year that I'd try to attract more people next year as well, but I'd still be grateful to get more members quicker.

"Of course not, no second year would join a club this far through the year. They'd end up leaving almost as soon as they'd joined."

However, the president's shapely eyebrows crinkled into a frown and she refuted me sharply.

The moment she opened her mouth showed her for the intimidating demon-president she was. She had a frank way of speaking that made you feel like you were talking to a senior or a teacher.

“I wouldn’t even mind a second year you know? I’d take anyone at this point.” I tried to persevere, a pained smile on my face. She wasn’t being abusive or anything, just speaking the truth bluntly. The half a year we’d spent as classmates let me know that much. “You like books too, right? Our activities’d be a perf-”

“I don’t have time for pointless chatter, so I’ll get to the point,” the president cut coldly over my words. And then, said something unthinkable and incomprehensible, “Gather your things and get out.”

“Huh?”

“As a result of the recent student council meeting, it has been decided to revoke this room from the literature club.”

“That’s so arbitrary!”

“There are lots of things that would be better in clubrooms. If we were giving clubrooms to clubs like you that don’t actually do anything, we decided we’d be better off giving them to clubs that have a lot of members and will actually do things. Your adviser also gave their consent.”

“Oi, wait a minute, we’re doing things. I’m recruiting right now.”

“You’re just sitting there.”

“Well, no one’s come to visit today.”

I tried to make it look like it just happened to be that no one had visited today. Speaking honestly, no one had come since the end of the summer holidays, but I thought a bluff was my best bet. If we lost our clubroom, considering our poor luck with recruiting anyway, that would spell our end.

“Hmm. Though you seem to be missing the book to greet the new entrants?”

“Ah, that’s...”



That was painful. Every year the literature club published an anthology they called ‘The New Member Greeting Issue’ but we hadn’t this year. There weren’t any manuscripts.

The reason for that was simple.

I couldn’t write them.

The third-years had left, and no first years had joined, so I was the only one left doing activities. And because I couldn’t write a manuscript, there was no way I could publish the book.

“You hadn’t published anything before the holidays either, can you still call that performing club activities?” I had no reply. That sums the president up, she came because she understood everything that was going on. Our moat had been entirely filled in. “Now quickly gather your things. If you leave things you don’t want behind, the student council will dispose of them.”

She laid out her declaration without even a twitch of her eyebrows. I stood in a dilemma.

But I had some backbone myself.

This clubroom means a lot to me. I’ve come here every day since April in first year.

Besides, my seniors and the old boys had memories filling the place too... I couldn’t just let us be chased out.

“Making it immediate is unreasonable,” I tried to resist as much as I could, “There are things that the third-years and old boys left behind, so we won’t know what to get rid of, I’d like some more time.”

“Well, that’s true I suppose.”

She nodded.

I raised my mental fists in triumph.

Thus was my strategy. There would be the cultural festival at the start of October. It was a tradition to publish an issue for it, but that made it probable for me to be able to get entries. I planned to get the third-years that had left the club to give entries for the end of their student lives. If I could publish a book, they wouldn't be able to say the club was doing nothing.

“Well then, could you do so within the fortnight? If we can clear the room before preparations for the cultural festival start in earnest, there won’t be an issue.”

“Eh...”

I was lost for words. That was the exact worst time for me. Was she doing it on purpose...?

However, her expression was diligent and asking me to do so rather than a nasty smile. She was strict, but not the type to make others suffer.

“Isn’t two weeks a little too fast?”

“Is it? I would think that if you start contacting them today you’ll easily be able to make it in time. You can just mail the things.”

“Ah, but, um...”

“Ah, don’t worry about the shipping fees, we’ll give you some of the budget. You’re having the room unilaterally removed from you, we can at least be accommodating as far as that goes.”

I could do nothing but close my mouth in the face of her eloquent declaration. It was completely given out of good-will. The president was just a genuine person like that I think.

“Well that’s how it is, so please do.”

After she was finished telling me everything important, the president turned around and happily left the room. Her straight-backed stride was light and all I could do in return was collapse on the desk.

Part 2

I’d tried to write novels myself. It was the reason I joined the club in the first place, I’d spent so long reading and enjoying novels, I wanted to write one myself.

However, each time I decided to write something and sat down in front of a blank page or computer screen, I couldn’t write a single letter.

Then I started reading dozens of books like *How to Write a Novel!* But it didn’t help. I tried doing what the books suggested but none of it helped.

There might be people who’d want to ask what someone like me would do in the club seeing as I can’t even write. Several of my classmates actually *have* asked that.

Roughly speaking, my job would be everything other than writing. For example, I’d read the submitted manuscripts and point out issues with language and plot, and depending on the circumstances I’d also consider how to improve things with the author and help search for materials.

So in short, my job was to make a place that the creators could shine their brightest.

It sounds cooler like that, but with no submissions, there was nothing I could do.

In the end, the day finished the same way it always did, with no applicants appearing and with me not writing a word. I had opened a notebook and strained for ideas, but it was to no avail.

My phone vibrated in my pocket while I was in the midst of my disappointment as I walked home.

Eina: I got a weapon against stains. I'll win now!

“She seems like she’s having fun,” I let out in a sigh. But then I saw the following message and my heart clenched.

Eina: It’s all over. I want to die.

I was shocked at the sheer lack of excitement and happiness that had been present until now.

To die?

Why?

The messages halted there. I got home, ate dinner and headed to my room and there still hadn’t been any more.

It shouldn’t be strange for a girl in her teens like she seems to be to send a message in that time period.

Did she maybe give up because I didn’t reply?

Or did she really die?

Or maybe... she was preparing to...

Shuu: Don't die.

I didn't mean to do that.

I replied and realised that this itself was a method a trickster would use. They'd send several cheerful messages, then suddenly switch to something heavy...

The mark would wonder what had happened and naturally reply...

But it was too late now.

I'll accept my fate.

I tried sending another message.

Shuu: You can't die. Did something happen? I'll give you advice.

I'd already replied once, and now here I was getting further into things. I guess you could say this followed the saying 'in for a penny, in for a pound' maybe?

Besides, I'd been wondering what kind of spam this was, so this would work.

Eina: Eh, who's this?

She replied immediately. Now for the swindling.

Eina: There shouldn't be comments on this diary app.

But I didn't really understand what she meant.

Shuu: Diary? It's a chat app isn't it?

Eina: I've been using it as a diary app though... I guess it's not? Umm, have you been getting these messages the whole time?

Shuu: Well, yeah.

Eina: I-I-I'm sorry for bothering you!

I could practically see a girl bowing her head in a frantic apology. She seemed to be a good actor.

Shuu: Eh, it's fine. So, why do you want to die?

I decided to continue, talking to a girl who wanted to kill herself, or that kind of setup at least. Then I waited for a response, sure it would be something girlish like failing a confession.

And then...

Eina: I can't find a reason to keep living.

A reason... to live...?

This was an awfully philosophical spam message.

Eina: Living is painful, there are no positive reasons to live, so I thought I should just die.

Shuu: But there's still gotta be some enjoyable things, right?

Eina: There's not *nothing*. It's a little fun to read I guess... but there's much more pain.

Shuu: But if you died, people would be upset, like your friends and family...

Eina: They wouldn't, not at all.

My breath caught in my throat.

I could *feel* the loneliness from the words.

I might have hit a nerve, I didn't know the girl that called herself Eina, or her situation, so I shouldn't speak carelessly.

I thought that and smiled tightly. I guess I was already well under the impression that she was indeed a girl.

Listen, Shuu, this is just one of their tricks. The calm part of my mind urged me. But what if that one-in-a-million chance was true, and there really was a girl considering suicide? Should I do something?

It doesn't matter if I'm tricked.

If it wasn't true, then that was that. If this was a joke, then so be it. You can laugh at me if you like.

Anyway, I decided to continue as if Eina was a normal girl at risk of committing suicide.

Shuu: If you die and then change your mind, you can't come back, are you sure?

But what I came up with was pathetic and I slumped slightly. I doubted those shallow words would stop someone thinking of killing themselves.

Eina: I wouldn't change my mind if I was dead. I'd just be a body.

Just like I thought, Eina's reply supported that.

Alone, I crossed my arms and thought.

How did you stop someone from killing themselves? She had no reason to live, no one would mourn her, and she wouldn't regret it after...

She enjoyed reading, but there was too much pain in living-

If she could find a reason to live, that would be enough, but finding one in such a short time would-

“Wait a minute...”

She liked reading?

That's a great idea.

If she didn't have a reason to live, I'd make her one.

Shuu: I'm changing the topic, but have you ever felt like writing a book?

Eina: Isn't that a rather huge topic change?

Shuu: It's important. My literature club doesn't have enough authors so we couldn't publish anything. I'm searching for someone to write for us. You interested? You like reading, right?

Eina: Uh, I am interested, but I've never written a story.

Excellent, she's joining in. I sent messages pressing it.

Shuu: You've been writing great so far, I'm sure you'll be fine. If you try and can't, that's fine too.

Eina: But is it okay for me to write it? I'm not a member or anything, and I don't even go to your school.

Shuu: It might be a problem technically, but I'll do something about that. I don't think using a pen-name will be an issue. I'll come up with some excuse like one of the members wrote it anonymously or something. Besides, this is life and death for me too. If I can't publish something within two weeks, the student council will take our clubroom.

Eina: That's awful! Okay! I'll try it!

She seemed completely into it. Was the thing about losing the clubroom effective? She was surprisingly kind-hearted. Anyway, she seemed to have forgotten about killing herself.

And if I could get the manuscript, and publish a book then I might even be able to defend the clubroom.

Truly two birds with one stone.

Eina: Umm, are there any requirements?

Shuu: Not really. Just write what you like. Or would requirements make it easier?

Eina: They would! It's my first time after all!

Shuu: Then something with a high school girl as the protagonist. The contents won't be questioned.

Eina: Got it!

Part 3

It was the next day, and there was a message waiting from Eina with a text file attached.

I figured it was the plot or general setting and opened it before looking at it in surprise.

It was a manuscript.

I couldn't help but mutter in shock.

“Oi, seriously?”

There were about five-thousand words, perfect for a short story.

Shuu: Thank you for the manuscript! That's amazing, did you write it all last night?

I messaged Eina, still in my pyjamas. Immediately, her reply arrived.

Eina: I stayed up all night.

Shuu: You've not written before, right? That's amazing.

Eina: Ehehe.

Shuu: I'll read it as fast as I can and tell you what I think. I'll check for typos and omissions, and look over the plot and stuff as well.

Eina: Please do!

While I headed to school, I wondered, just who was she?

To be able to write so much in a single night...

I'd thought she was in middle or high school, but maybe she was a university student?

Maybe even a worker? I probably should just ask...

While I waited in the clubroom as usual, I started reading Eina's manuscript on my phone.

It was a youth novel.

The summary was more or less this:

A high school girl met the ghost of a girl on her school roof. The ghost had died in a traffic accident and asked to borrow the protagonist's body for a single day, because there was someone that she had to meet and tell her feelings to. That person was the boy the protagonist liked...

The protagonist went through something like an out of body experience, following the ghost and boy's date while floating in the air. Seeing their happiness, she freely chose to let herself fade away and fulfil their love.

It was a fairly sad story, but it was so well written that it touched my heart. This was even better than I had hoped for.

“Right, this bit’s hard to understand so I should help revise it... I want to know more about her motivations too, there are bits you can’t tell what she’s thinking...”

I noted down my thoughts while I muttered to myself.

I might be saying it for her honour, but I thought that it was a wonderful piece of writing. If you asked why I was writing down ways to improve it if that was the case, then that would be because I was sure it could be even more wonderful.

It was hard to write a complete manuscript in one go, all authors said that. For instance, even if an author felt that what they had written was common sense, it wasn’t uncommon for it to be unclear to other people that read it and there could be unexpected mistakes in expressions. Having someone else look it over was very effective to brush up the work.

But at the same time, it needed a delicate touch. When the author submitted their manuscript, they were submitting their best and having points to improve pointed out to them wasn’t a pleasant feeling. On top of that, I wasn’t a professional editor, I was simply a fan of novels that was part of a school’s literature club. I might make mistakes myself.

Would I be able to convey my opinions without hurting the author, and have her carefully check them...

Until now, I had spoken with the authors directly in the clubroom, but... With Eina, we couldn’t meet.

I still wasn't sure she wasn't part of some scam, I didn't even know her age or if she was in fact a she. She might even be someone dangerous. Besides, I didn't know where she lived. I lived in Chiba, if she lived in Hokkaido or Okinawa, we couldn't meet easily.

“...”

At that thought, I looked at the manuscript on my phone screen again.

I was there, thinking that we couldn't meet, but at the same time, at the bottom of my heart, I wanted to do so.

I just wanted to meet and talk to the one that had written something so wonderful.

“Nah, that's not going to happen.”

I muttered to myself, putting a lid on my wish to meet her. When I thought about it calmly, there was no way I could meet her. But if not, how would I give my impressions...

I'll put as many corrections in the file as I can.

I pulled out one of the club's laptops and connected my phone to get the file off.

“Hmm, this one?”

I didn't know why I felt uncomfortable right away, but I soon noticed that the timestamp was strange.

The timestamp on the file that Eina had sent was xx/09/2013.

It was 2018 right now, so it was exactly five years ago.

Did she lie about staying up all night and sent something she had written before?

So she really was trying to trick me?
But what would doing that accomplish? Besides, the end result was too nice...

Or maybe her settings are wrong? Though I don't know how you could make that kind of mistake.

I started writing comments in the file.

*

After I got home and had eaten, I sent a message to Eina.

Shuu: I read the manuscript. It was good.

A reply came back within the second.

Eina: Really?

Shuu: Yeah. I felt so sad when I finished reading it, but it wasn't unpleasant. I think it was a great novel.

Eina: You're praising me too much.

Apparently she's shy.

Shuu: I pointed out a few typos and issues, but...

Eina: Ah, right.

Shuu: I added comments to the file, would you check them over?

I attached the file and sent it to Eina.

Eina: It sent.

Shuu: Can you open it?

Eina: I opened it. Ahhhhhh.

Shuu: What's wrong?

Eina: I'm sorry! I'm really sorry!

Eina kept apologising.

Dammit. Maybe I put too many corrections in. I'd tried to be as careful as I could about them, but I guess corrections on your first work had a real impact.

Shuu: You don't need to apologise. This kind of thing is normal.

Eina: But, but... I took up your time, and...

No good, it wasn't coming through in the text. It wouldn't be solved like this.

“What do I do? ...Hmm?”

I noticed something on my screen. The app had free voice calls. I tapped the button, mostly by reflex.

I put my phone to my ear and listened to the dial tone.

And then — it connected.

《Hello?》

The soprano from my phone took my breath away. Her voice was beautiful.

It was a little higher than I imagined while we were chatting, and was a clear sound.

“Hello, this is Shuu. Um... Nice to meet you.”

《It’s nice to meet you too.》

It felt like she was close enough that I could hear her breathe.

“...”

《...》

“So.” 《Umm.》

We both stopped talking, having started at the same time.

《...Go ahead.》

“Sorry. About the manuscript.”

《Y-yesh...》

Even through the phone, I could tell she was really nervous. Maybe she thought I was angry with her?

Because of that, I spoke as kindly as I could.

“It was really great.”

《Eh? But there were so many corrections...》

“The corrections are there because it was good. I was sure it could be even better. Sorry, I might have been a bit harsh, but I didn’t want to speak ill of it.”

《I should be the one who’s sorry. It’s sort of... all over the place.》

“It’s just your first time. If you don’t want to revise it, you can just check over the typos and print it as is. I didn’t find anything glaring.”

《No! You put so much effort into editing, I’ll do my best revising it!》

Her voice was much more energetic than before and I relaxed. Actually talking really was important.

《Umm, so, can I ask some questions?》

“Of course!”

《What do you mean in your first comment... when you say you want more of a picture of the protagonist’s psychological state...?》

“Ah, that. I thought it might be better if you said more about why she let the ghost borrow her body. It’ll get more empathy that way, right?”

《I see! Then, on the next page—》

And thus the conversation passed peacefully, until we were finished.

“Is that okay? You don’t have any questions?”

《It’s okay!》

“I might have made mistakes myself, so please point them out.”

《I don’t think you have!》

And so we went over her manuscript several times over the weekend, and Eina’s novel was completed.

Part 4

“Shuu-kun, what’s with this manuscript?” Asked Ruka-senpai as she finished reading the printed manuscript.

It was Monday, and we were in the clubroom.

She was a third-year in the literature club. She was a woman with full, wavy hair and a charming, kind smile. She was calm and spoke quietly so being with her was rather peaceful.

“I got it from an acquaintance.” I answered, garnering a questioning look from Ruka-senpai.

“An acquaintance? Whooo?”

“It’s a secret. They wanted to be anonymous.”

“Mgh.”



Ruka-senpai really wanted to know about the author, but I could hardly say ‘I got it from someone I met on a chat app.’ I didn’t want to make her worry that I might be being scammed.

“It’s sudden, but can I get you to make a cover illustration and design for this?”

Ruka-senpai didn’t write either. She drew illustrations instead, and designed covers. Obviously, she liked books, but she wasn’t the type to want to write them herself, she wanted to design the actual books. The right person in the right place as it were.

There were two other third-year members who mainly wrote. Incidentally, they were the ones that had retired to focus on their exams.

“Yeah, is by Friday okay?”

Ruka-senpai smiled at me and nodded.

“That’s fine. Thank you so much for doing it while you’re busy studying.”

“No worries. I’d be sad if we lost the room too, and I want to support you.”

I was moved by her kindness.

The cover was sorted. I’d get it on Friday and then print on Saturday and then publish it on the Monday.

Though I’d need to ask the student council to borrow the printing room. That was a little depressing. President Minekawa would be there, and I didn’t really want to see her.

But I had to go, so I said my goodbyes to Ruka-senpai and headed to their office.

“Excuse me.”

I knocked on the door and entered the room. The members were all working away at their desks. They all seemed busy, so no one came to deal with me.

I wasn't really in a hurry, so I just waited relaxedly at the door.

“Got it. I will go and talk to the baseball club and...”

The president was working at an inner desk. I couldn't help but stare at the site.

She seemed to be dealing with the sports clubs.

She had a refined smile upon her face and looked somewhat like one of the western paintings of saints.

She really was photogenic.

“Literature club?”

She noticed me and looked towards me, her eyebrows creasing together.

She always looks upset to see me.

I put a strained smile on my face.

“Do you need something? We're rather busy at the moment.”

She said as she stood and walked towards me.

“I'd like to borrow the print room on Saturday, is it free?”

“It's free.”

She spun on her heel and took a notebook from the shelves.

“Put your class and name here, and when you'll be using it.”

I wrote it just as she said.

“What are you printing though?”

“The new students’ book.”

“You wrote something?”

“*I* didn’t.”

Seeing as I was talking with her, I decided to ask about the clubroom.

“Hey, President, if we’re actually doing things, we won’t be driven out of our room, right?”

“I can’t decide it myself, but if you keep publishing, I can bring it back to the agenda.”

“I promise, we’ll keep publishing.”

“Okay. I’ll bring it up at the meeting tomorrow. But there’s one more condition.”

“A condition?”

“Give me one of that book too.”

“We give them away for free though?”

We always put them in boxes on each floor by the noticeboards with ‘Please take one’ on the box.

“Bring one to me.”

“Why?”

“There’s no harm in that much effort, is there? I’ve said I’ll undermine something already decided after all.”

I thought that it was putting the burden on us bringing it, but if following that condition let us defend our clubroom, I could answer immediately.

When we finished, she returned to her desk without even a ‘goodbye’ and because of that, I couldn’t even thank her.

She was always so blunt. I knew she was a practical person, but she at least smiled at the people she was dealing with, but she still looked so sourly at me.

“I guess she really does hate me...”

I muttered as I walked through the corridors. I couldn’t help but think back to how I met her.

It was the first day of school. I was a self-admitted bookworm, and curious about what books the school I’d joined had, so I had gone to the library when the day had finished. I liked reading rooms and libraries, they had a nice impression about them when they were filled with books. The dusty scent of old books made you feel like you were being enveloped in the books so they held a different charm from a bookstore.

I looked along the shelves of books starting at the corner.

“Oh!”

I had found one of my favourite Sci-Fi books and unconsciously reached out for it.

It was a Sci-Fi book that dealt with time, called *The Door Into Summer*.

There was another hand reaching out for it so I stopped.

“Go ahead.”

I withdrew my hand.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I’ve read it be...fore.”

I saw the hand’s owner and was lost for words.

She was so beautiful that I had to swallow.

That was the Demon President, Minekawa Yukino.

“You’re Yagi Shuu-kun in class A, right?”

“Yeah,” I managed to say when I was addressed by her.

Why did she know my name? I’d only just joined the school...

“I’m Minekawa Yukino from class B. Nice to meet you.”

“Y-yeah, nice to meet you.”

“Do you... like books?”

“Yeah, do you?”

“Yeah.”

“So are you in the literature club?”

“I’m sort of lost. There’s so much I want to do...”

“I see. I’m joining them, so let’s get on if you do.”

“...I’ll keep it in mind.”

I still haven’t forgotten that soft and kind smile. She didn’t join the literature club in the end and I mostly lost contact with her. You could say that day in first year was our first and last link.

Then, when we met again in the same class in second year, she seemed to treat me harshly. We’d barely spoken, so I didn’t know why she hated me all of a sudden. Life truly is full of mysteries.

Part 5

I printed a hundred of the booklets.

Though they were being distributed freely, there was a limit to how many students liked books, so it was a fair amount. But when working on it alone, it was a pretty large amount.

It was Saturday and I could hear the sports club members from outside.

I finished up in the print room and carried the printed materials to the clubroom and started binding them.

The work itself was simple. I'd fold each B4 sheet in half, pile them up, then staple them together. I hadn't gotten enough sleep, so just carrying the materials to the clubroom was tiring.

Ruka-senpai had sent the illustration on Friday morning and I had been typesetting everything from after school until this morning. The text itself was complete, but that took until the morning.

I had a nap and then went to the print room, which brought me to noon.

I ate the lunch I bought at the store ahead of time and then began work in earnest.

I folded paper silently as music played from my phone.

The latest printers would read the data and bind the output into books on their own, but my school didn't have anything so expensive. Because of that, we had to do it by hand... but I was the only active member.

“I have to do it.”

I said, purposefully pompous to motivate myself, the very image of a tragic hero.

Sort of like a late night excitement.

And then:

Vrr vrr.

My phone buzzed.

Eina: Hello, how are you?

Shuu: Alright.

Eina: What are you doing today?

Shuu: Binding the books.

Eina: You've got club today?

Shuu: Well, I'm on my own.

Eina: No one's helping you!? That's awful!

Shuu: The third-years have all retired, so I'm just the only one active.

Eina: I see... So you're binding them alone? How many?

Shuu: A hundred.

Eina: Waa, that's a lot. I... can't help you, sorry.

Shuu: It's fine. Just having someone to talk to makes it easier.

Eina: Then if it's not a hassle, I'll call.

The call came through practically as I finished reading and I answered it on speaker phone.

《Hello, Shuu-san?》

“Hey.”

《Do your best. I'm cheering for you.》

“Thanks.”

《...》

“...”

《I can't actually think of anything to talk about.》

“We don't know anything about each other. Let's introduce ourselves or something. What kind of books do you like, Eina?”

《Hmm... I like fantasy-ish things. Like fairy-tales. Romance too. What about you?》

“I like pretty much everything, but Sci-Fi in particular.”

《What do you like to eat?》

Eina was the one to ask a question this time.

“Ramen, katsudon, stuff like that.”

《That's typical for a boy.》

“What about you, Eina?”

《I like anything sweet! Cake, choux creams, dorayaki, anmitsu...》

I guessed that just listing sweet things would be just like a girl.

《Next question then! Do you have a girlfriend?》

“I don't.”

《What about someone you like?》

Suddenly, the president's face came to mind and I immediately gave a wry smile.

She was definitely beautiful, but she was out of my league. I could just admire her from afar. If anything, I didn't really want to talk with her.

It's tough to see her act like she hates me when we talk face to face.

“I guess I’ve got someone I look up to.”

《Eh, eh. What kind of person are they.》

“What kind of person? ...Hmm, I don’t really know. I barely know anything about her.”

《Ah, so it’s one-sided...》

“Guess so. What about you then? Do you have a boyfriend?”

《Do you really think I would?》

I thought *probably not* and then asked.

“What about someone you like?”

《Ummm. There’s someone I look up to,》 apparently she wanted to avoid the question, 《and, it’s one-sided for me too, probably.》

She sounded kind of lonely and it made my heart ache. A one-sided love... that’s tough.

“If you need advice, I can help maybe?”

《Thank you. I’m okay for now, but please do when it comes to it.》

We carried on our meandering conversation like that, the time seemed like it flew as I talked with Eina and the sun had set before I knew it, the books were fully bound.

Part 6

It was Monday, and the books were safely next to the noticeboards. I headed straight to the student council office once they were set up.

The president was alone, sat working.

“President, I brought it like I promised.”

“Thank you, and like I promised, we won’t be taking your clubroom.”

“Yes! I owe you one.”

“In exchange, it might seem boring, but do your activities properly, okay?”

“Got it.”

I left their office in triumph.

*

The new students’ booklet, late as it was, caused a quiet boom within the school. Our literature club had a tradition of publishing things under our real names, but ‘Eina’ was obviously a pseudonym. On top of that, there weren’t many people who wrote stories like Eina’s.

Everyone was curious about who on Earth had written it, and it seemed like more people were reading it than normal. For example, when I was eating lunch on Wednesday, the newspaper club’s ace, Sakai Keisuke appeared.

Sakai had been in the same class as me since first year, and we’d done a lot together, but he hadn’t shown up in the clubroom before then.

“Who’s Eina? A new member? An alias for one of the upper years? Or you even?”

Saki didn’t bother to push up his glasses from where they had slipped and showered me with questions.

“I’m not telling you.”

Besides, I couldn’t even if I wanted to, I knew barely anything about her myself.

“Please, we’re friends right? My boss threatened me to come and ask who they were!”

Sakai was all but on his knees begging me. It was a bit pitiful, but if I couldn’t tell him, I couldn’t tell him.

“Sorry, I can’t.”

“You’re heartless.”

“I’ve got my own circumstances, and so has Eina.”

“Ahhhh, I’m gonna get fireeeeeed!”

It was tough to calm Sakai down from his crying, but I was happy that it was that popular.

I wanted to tell Eina right away. I sent Sakai away and sent a message to her.

Shuu: Everyone likes your story!

The reply came when I got home.

Eina: Really!?

I didn’t normally get messages from Eina during school, so she probably sent them when she got home. Maybe she went to a school that forbade phones.

Shuu: Really! The newspaper club came to cover it. They want to know who wrote it! I dodged it though.

Eina: It's doing that well!?

I could feel her happiness from the screen.

Then, I remembered something important.

Shuu: Oh yeah, I forgot. What shall I do with the finished book? Want me to post it?

Eina: Posting it... might be a bit of an issue.

Shuu: I guess you wouldn't want to give out your address.

Of course she wouldn't. As far as she was concerned, I was just some random person.

Eina: No, I wouldn't mind... But my family might not like someone they don't know sending something...

Shuu: I see.

Eina: U-um... Could you... possibly... give it to me in person?

My heart leapt as soon as I saw the message. I'd be meeting with Eina—

Eina: Ah! I'm sorry! I didn't ask where you live.

Eina sent another message while I couldn't decide what to reply with.

Eina: I live in Chiba, so I think anything around Kanto should work.

“Ehh!?”

I couldn't help but cry out in surprise. Eina lived in Chiba too!?

Did coincidences like that really happen?

For some reason, my heart was pounding.

Eina: Shuu-san, where do you live?

Shuu: I live in Chiba too, in C City.

It had ended up with a string of messages from Eina, so I hurriedly replied with where I lived.

Eina: Than shall we meet by C Station?

Shuu: That's fine.

Eina: Alright, thank you. Until Saturday then!

Part 7

The station was filled with people, possibly because it was Saturday. The place was clean and tidy since it had been refitted two years ago, and was perfect for watching for people.

I arrived at the ticket barrier ten minutes before we'd agreed to meet.

Shuu: I got here a bit early. I'm in front of the pillar. I'm wearing a black coat and jeans, I'm in my teens.

Eina: Me too. The pillar...? Ummm, where?

Shuu: In front of the ticket gates. Just on your right on the way out.

Eina: The right... can you put your hand up?

I put my hand up like she asked.

Shuu: It's up.

Eina: Huh, where are you?

Shuu: What are you wearing?

Eina: I've got a light knitted shirt, a pair of culottes, and sandals. My hair's straight and I'm in my teens.

I looked around. I saw plenty of girls in their teens, but no one looking around.

Shuu: That's weird. Not the private station, right?

Eina: Nope~

Shuu: Guessed so. Then go to the ticket machine, I'll go too.

Eina: Right, I'm here.

She wasn't there.

Eina: It's hard to find people when it's being renovated.

I frowned.

Shuu: Renovated? That already finished right?

Eina: Eh? They said it would take three more years, didn't they?

Shuu: ...

Eina: ...

She was probably messing with me, or was somewhere else with the same name.

There was only one station called C Station in Chiba though.

Then I remembered the timestamp on her file, xx/09/2013. It was 2018 now so it was exactly five years ago.

The renovations had finished two years ago, so the time matched with Eina saying it would take 'three more years'.

Shuu: Could you send a picture of the front of the station.

Eina: Got it.

My phone chimed as it arrived. It was covered in building barriers, so right in the middle of being renovated.

I'm being tricked.

You could fake this kind of thing easily. For instance, if you took the initial messages to me as ‘a girl living in 2013’ it would be simple to follow on from that.

But for some reason, I couldn’t doubt Eina. Was she really someone who would tell such a lie?

So—

Shuu: Eina, what year is it?

Eina: Eh? Why?

She responded with the obvious question.

Shuu: I’ll explain later, tell me?

Eina: It’s 2013...

I read ‘2013’ over and over again. There was no mistake.

Maybe it’s a lie.

But I wanted to believe her, so... I spoke honestly.

Shuu: Don’t be too surprised, it’s 2018 for me.

There was no response for a while.

Eina: That’s... I can’t believe it.

Shuu: Nor can I.

Part 8

I went to a nearby park, sat on a bench, and called Eina. It was getting annoying talking via text.

『Hello, it's Eina.』

She answered right away.

“It's Shuu. Is it really 2013 for you? You're not tricking me, right?”

I asked bluntly.

『What good does tricking you do me?』

She sounded upset. I could imagine a high schooler pouting at me.

“Maybe you're a classmate and you had to prank me for some kind of punishment game.”

『You're thinking too much. Besides, I'd have already shouted ‘pranked’ and the others would have appeared by now, right? I wouldn't need to carry on, would I?』 That was true. 『I thought you might be tricking me too, but I couldn't think of any reason for you to, so I thought I should accept it as the truth.』

“Is it possible to talk to someone five years in the past though?”

『Whether it's possible or not, we at least can't meet and talk.』

I took out the book from my bag and looked down at it.

I wouldn't be able to give this to Eina then.

That was a shame... I could make it into a PDF and send it? It might not be like having the real thing, but it was better than nothing.

As those thoughts went through my head, I realised something.

“No, we can meet.”

《Eh, but we're living at different times?》

“I can meet you from five years later. Of course, you have to wait for that, sorry.”

It wasn't a hundred or two hundred years, but just five. Of course, in five years a high schooler like me would be an adult, so it was a long time, but not so long that we had to give up on meeting. Or so it shouldn't have been, but for some reason, Eina was silent.

“Eina?”

After a while, Eina spoke quietly.

《...If I tell you to stop, will you hate me?》

“Eh, of course not...”

《Sorry, I'm being selfish.》

She seemed to slump over the phone.

I panicked at the change from her usual bright attitude.

“You didn't do anything wrong, I'm sorry for bringing it up.”

《No, I'm in the wrong. I really do want to meet you.》

My heart sped up as she said that.

《But I'm scared. Scared to know my future. I mean...》

Eina's voice dropped, and she whispered.

《What if I'm dead after five years?》

It felt like I'd been stabbed at her quiet words.

Eina... dying?

“Are you... ill?”

《Eh? No, I’m not. I’m just talking hypothetically. If I died, that’s fine. I might have met with some horrible fate. There are lots of things worse than death.》

She said it hypothetically.

She wasn’t wrong, anyone’s life could change drastically every day. But most people lived with a vague sense they would still be here the next day, the day after that... and even five or ten years later.

People could live a normal life because they didn’t doubt that. But Eina had said she might die.

Why?

What would make her say that...?

《I’m sure that if something terrible had happened to me in the future, you’d hide it. But I might be able to tell from your voice, and I’m scared of that. I’m sorry.》

But I didn’t ask what her situation was, or why she was so pessimistic.

She was actually thinking about suicide when we first talked.

It probably wasn’t unrelated.

But I couldn’t ask, there was still too much distance between us. I didn’t know if I could ask such a probing question to someone I’d never even seen before.

“Okay, then let’s keep talking, Eina.”

《Yes! Let’s!》

I spoke as brightly as I could, and possibly because of that, Eina's voice was energetic again.

I let out a sigh.

Part 9

While I was lying around in my room that night, a message came from Eina.

Eina: Can I call you now?

Shuu: Sure.

The call soon came through.

“Hello.”

《Hello, Shuu-san? It's Eina, I'm sorry to call so late.》

She wasn't just saying it by rote, it seemed just like her.

“Don't worry about it. Tomorrow is a holiday. So, what's up?”

《I was thinking. We should have some rules since I am from five years in the past.》

“Rules?”

I frowned.

《Yes, rules to avoid influencing the past. I think not changing the past as much as possible is for the best. It comes up a lot in Sci-Fi, right?》

“That's true. So wouldn't talking to me like this count?”

《That's what I mean by as much as possible. A small impact should be alright, but a big change might make the universe explode or something.》

I had heard that kind of thing before.

『First of all, as much as you can, don't tell me anything about the future.』

Well, that's pretty basic.

Hmm? Wait a minute.

“If I tell you what companies did well, you can get rich, right? Then you can split it with me later...”

『Shuu-san! That's the worst thing you could say!』

“I'm joking.”

『Mgh!』

I laughed, but it seemed like she was pouting on the other end of the phone.

“I'm sorry.”

『It's not a laughing matter. We have to be careful with things that can make money. I'd prefer it if you didn't even tell me what products are popular in five years.』

“Roger that.”

『Also... we shouldn't talk too much about me.』

“Why?”

『If you know things about me, you might change the future me somehow, right?』

“That's true. I won't ask as much as possible.”

『Now that I think about it, it's mostly me telling you to be careful, I'm sorry.』

“There’s no avoiding it, I’m the one in the future.”

《I should be able to tell you about the past, so if there’s anything you want to know, let me know.》

“Like what?”

《Umm, like what Chiba was like five years ago?》

“I doubt it will have changed that much in five years.”

《That’s true.》

She seemed somewhat disheartened.

“Don’t worry about it. I’m in the future, so you can’t change it.”

《You’re kind, thank y-》

Beeeep.

Suddenly, the call cut off.

“Eina?”

I called back, but it didn’t connect.

After ten minutes, a call came from her.

《I’m sorry, Shuu-san.》

“It’s okay, what happened?”

《My phone doesn’t seem to be doing well...》

She put it awkwardly, if there wasn’t a problem with the transmission, it should be the phone, but Eina didn’t seem to want to elaborate, so I closed my mouth.

《I’ll leave it there for tonight then.》

“Yeah, night.”

The call cut off abruptly again.

What happened?

As I thought about it, I noticed something.

I didn't want to know about the past.

The past didn't matter.

I wanted to know more about Eina.

Intermission 1 — Eina's Room

My cousin opened the door and shouted at me.

“Shut up!”

I hung up on Shuu-san and hid my phone under the futon.

“I was reading a book out loud, it’s homework.”

“Then do it more quietly. Who do you think you are? You freeloader!

You’ll make Mama angry!”

She slammed the door shut with an almighty crash. I let out a breath and took my phone back out, praising myself for hiding it right away, she just thought I was making noise on my own. I didn’t want to make her angry, but I was happy I could keep my secret.

If she found out I just picked up the smartphone she had thrown away, she’d be *really* angry and take it away.

I lay back on the futon as I cradled my phone, having a staring contest with the low ceiling.

This was the cupboard under the stairs and, more or less, my room.

There wasn’t room for a freeloader like me, so I was assigned this space instead. It was surprisingly comfortable, given its looks. It wasn’t really in the sun so it wasn’t hot in the summer, and it was small so stayed fairly warm in the winter too.

There was an extension lead from the next room for power, so that was fine.

Above all, for me, it was my castle. A place where no one was in my way, a world just for me.

Here I read books, wrote a novel, and talked with Shuu-san.

I wore hand-me-downs from my cousin. I studied with second-hand textbooks and read books that I borrowed from the school library. I wanted to borrow books from the city library too, but you couldn't get a library card without your guardian, so that was difficult.

Well, it'd take a while to read all the books at school so that wasn't a problem. I could use my phone to read books on the internet too.

Of course, the phone didn't have a contract, but I had Wi-Fi at home so I could use it fine and there were still free Wi-Fi networks around outside, so I could still use it then.

Or I could use my cousin's portable hotspot so that was fine too. That's how I'd used my phone when I went to meet Shuu-san.

I'd be happy if I could get a contract, but if I said that then I wouldn't even be allowed into the house for a while.

It's so depressing to think of the situation I'm in.

I'd have to think of something fun.

Like books.

Or Shuu-san.

That's right, I have to call him. I hung up suddenly, so I'm sure he's suspicious.

Chapter 2 — Cultural Festival With Eina

Part 1

“Any other thoughts?”

The class representative called from in front of the teacher’s desk.

Things like cafe, play, haunted house, and arcade were written on the board.

The cultural festival was approaching. Once it came to light that our class may not decide in time, this half-hearted meeting was called right after homeroom.

I was quietly watching over the proceedings. Members of humanities clubs at our school weren’t deeply concerned with the classes’ offerings because they were far busier with those of their club.

Some schools would have offerings from sports clubs, but ours didn’t. Inevitably, the classes’ offerings focused on the sports club members and the going home club’s. Of course, us humanities clubs would help, but the main focus, and thus the students that were busiest were from those two categories.

“I’ll take the final vote from these, raise your hand for the one you want to do most.”

I raised my hand at the cafe, but the class as a whole voted for the play.

“A play, huh?”

“Seems difficult.”

“It’ll be fun though.”

“I’ll be villager A.”

My classmates began chattering about the play.

“Next then, we’ll decide what play we’re doing.”

Normally, something would be used for inspiration, like Cinderella, Snow White, or some fairy tale because it made things rather quick to arrange. The students were amateurs and would struggle to memorise the lines too, so I thought a full play would be too difficult.

With my mind occupied with various thoughts, I didn’t open my mouth. I would have a minor role in the end, and everyone chose the best ways they could help.

However—

“It’d be nice to have an original script.”

At the girl’s suggestion, the class’ focus shifted to an original script. I guess they were all getting excited about the cultural festival because it only happens once a year. But I worried if this would be okay. I thought a completely original script would be difficult. In the first place, what would we do about making the entire story?

But of course, I didn’t say a word. This was an opportunity for everyone to give their opinions, I didn’t want to rain on their parade before we decided anything.

“Who’ll write it though?”

“I’ve never written.”

“We have anyone in the drama club?”

“We don’t.”

“Who’ll do it then...”

What's this?

The students were all looking back. I had a feeling they were looking at me...

“That’s right, we’ve got Yagi-kun!”

A girl that had spoken to me maybe three times pointed at me.

“Me? I can’t write you know?”

“Why, you’re in the literature club right?”

“Being in the literature club doesn’t mean I can write.”

The class started booing at me and Sakai started cackling in a corner because he knew that I couldn’t write stories.

I glanced at the seat next to me and President Minekawa was glaring at me with a frown. What, even she thought I should be writing it.

“It’s something I can’t do.”

I refused to write it, so we ended the day just having decided to do a play and with the understanding that each of us would think over what kind of story we wanted. It was a rather grim outlook.

*

Eina: Good evening, Shuu-san. How are things going?

Shuu: I’m editing.

Eina: Ah, for the cultural festival edition? You managed to get submissions this time.

Shuu: It's the third years' last chance, so they always contribute.

Eina: Huh, Shuu-san, you seem down today.

I was taken aback. My feelings were in the writing? Was that a thing?

Shuu: There's just an annoyance. It's nothing big though.

I told her about the class meeting after school.

Eina: They booed you for not writing a script? That's awful!

Shuu: I shouldn't have given them expectations.

Eina: You didn't do anything wrong.

Shuu: Thanks. I wonder what we should do. If we go with an original and get ideas from everyone, I don't think we'll make it in time...

Writing it itself was hard enough, but the problem was after that. The lines would need to be memorised and rehearsed. We'd have to make props and costumes...

Eina: Shuu-san, this is just a suggestion, but...

Shuu: What?

Eina: Shall... I write... the script.

Shuu: ...Would you?

Eina: Yes, I'll give it a go!

Shuu: You must be busy though, right?

I said that, but I realised then that I knew nothing about her everyday life.

Eina: I'm not. I don't go to cram school and I'm not in a club. I'm free every day, so I think writing would be much more useful.

Shuu: Really!? That's great!

*

“Everyone listen.”

The next day after school, I stood in front of the teacher's desk.

“Oh, Yagi, decided to write the script?”

One of the boys said to me.

“I'm not, but I know someone who will. Eina, the one that wrote that story for the literature club.”

When I said that, the classroom filled with noise.

“I read that, it was interesting.”

“The person that wrote that should be able to write us something good, right?”

“Okay then, everyone who approves of having Eina-san write the script...”

The class representative took a vote, the majority of the class voting to do so.

“Thanks. So, what does everyone want from it? Requirements will make it easier to write, so give me any ideas you have,” I asked.

“I want romance!”

“A happy end!”

“A bit of mystery!”

I took notes of what everyone was saying.

“I wonder what kind of story it’ll be!?”

“I hope it’s an interesting one!”

I could tell the class was getting their hopes up. In honesty, so was I.

I would be able to read Eina’s next work. I was looking forward to that on its own, but it’d be made into a play for the class, I couldn’t help but get my hopes up for that.

I guess I am helping the class a lot this year, I thought.

The literature club had more members than me, when they gave me the materials, I could focus on the class’ offerings. The third years were also studying for exams, so all of them would pull together for their classes, it was a mutually beneficial relationship.

And because of that, I had sole discretion over how the literature club’s preparation was done. The club would need to print the booklet, bind it and place them for distribution. It was okay, I could do the editing at home. I could do the binding after the classwork was done in the clubroom. And if I did my best the day before, I could get the decoration done too.

“Shuu, come here,” Sakai whispered into my ear, “Is Eina-san in our class?”

“Why do you say that?”

“I mean, people wouldn’t write a script for another class, right?”

Sakai puffed up his chest at his insight.

“I wonder about that,” I dodged the question.

With that kind of questioning, you couldn’t answer with a yes or a no. That itself would give him information. A no would at least let him know that she wasn’t in our class.

“Kuh, you won’t fall for it, huh?”

“Of course not.”

Sakai tutted in annoyance.

“You’re really tight-lipped, Shuu. Too tight-lipped to have your best mate in the newspaper club.”

“It’d be dangerous to be your friend if I was loose-lipped, you’d be able to write about anything.

“I know what I should and shouldn’t write about.”

He was glancing my way, but I had no intention of talking about Eina.

Besides, I didn’t know anything about her to tell him.

Suddenly, my heart twinged. *What’s this feeling...*

Part 2

The next day:

Eina: Shuu-san, how did today go?

Shuu: I did the normal editing stuff. I got the illustrations and cover design from Ruka-senpai so I'm compiling the data.

Eina: Oh! Do your best!

Shuu: What about you? How's the script?

Eina: I'm drawing up a plan!

Shuu: Okay, let's both do our best!

Three days later:

Eina: Shuu-san, good work.

Shuu: You too.

Eina: What kind of day did you have?

Shuu: I went to school, then did editing afterwards, same as always. I'll want to help the class before the cultural festival, so I thought I'd get the literature club's work done now.

Eina: You're a hard worker, huh?

Shuu: I'm not, I only work hard at things I like.

Eina: That's still pretty amazing.

Shuu: Thanks, so what's the script like?

Eina: Uhh, it's getting there.

Shuu: Everyone's looking forward to it. So am I. Do your best.

One week later:

Normally, I'd always be getting messages from Eina, but I hadn't received any in the last three days. That's why I sent a message myself after school that day.

Shuu: Hi, how are you?

There was no response.

What was wrong, I wondered, usually I'd get a response immediately.

Maybe she was busy with her own school's festival?

At the thought, my phone buzzed.

Eina: Hi, how did your day go?

Shuu: I finally finished with the data for the booklet. Now I just need to buy paper and print it.

Eina: That's really quick!

Shuu: Yeah, now I should be able to help properly with the class. So, about the script...

Eina: Umm, ah, umm... I'm doing my best.

Shuu: When do you think you'll be done.

The replies paused again, and the next message was that evening, before I slept.

Eina: I think it'll take a little longer.

Shuu: I see...

I guess writing a script and a story really were different. I'd thought that she'd be able to write a full book in about a week seeing as she'd written a short story in a single night, but it might be a little difficult.

However, there were only two weeks left until the festival. If we didn't start making props and costumes soon, we wouldn't make it. The actors would need to learn the play too...

Actually, we needed to decide who had what role.

Shuu: Could you send what you've done so far? If you do we can make props and costumes and decide who's playing who.

Eina: What I've done so far... Umm, ummm... Actually...

And then, Eina sent a shocking message.

Eina: I still haven't written a single word.

“What!?”

I shouted in my room.

Not a single word? Why?

No, I don't have time to find out the reason.

This was serious. I doubted she could write the play within the fortnight remaining, besides, then it would be too late.

My eyes span as my thoughts whirled.

I'll talk to Ruka-senpai. She might know someone that did a play with their class. If we can borrow the script from them and perform it... Besides, a script would be prepared by the whole class...

Eina: Shuu-san? Shuu-san?

Another message appeared from Eina and I realised I had left it marked as read without replying.

Shuu: Sorry, Eina. I forgot to reply. Okay, then I'll tell everyone it's too much and that it's too hard to write an entire play in time, I'll find something else.

Eina: Eh!!

Shuu: It's okay, they'll understand. You were a volunteer in the first place.

Vzzzzt, vzzzzt.

My phone gave two long vibrations.

It was a call from Eina.

《Shuu-san... I'll do my best, I'll do my best, so...》

“H-hey...”

Eina was crying. Her voice was shaking, she was sniffling, and weeping over and over again.

I was flustered, maybe I shouldn't have sent the refusal all of a sudden. She might have thought I was angry.

“Eina, I’m not angry at all, you don’t need to worry. We were the ones that pushed this on to you, so if you just go at your own pace, that’s fine.”

《Shuu-san, don’t say that… Please, let me write the script!》

“But…”

《Talking with you is the only thing I live for. I don’t want to break it off, please don’t break it off, I’ll work harder…!》

I frowned. She was misunderstanding something. It was almost like…

“Eina. I don’t speak with you because you write novels or plays you know?”

《Fueeh?》

“Obviously, I think it’s wonderful that you do, but it wouldn’t be an issue if you didn’t. I can’t write after all.”

《You won’t be disappointed.》

“Why would I? Whether you write or not, you’re yourself, my precious-”

《Precious?》

My precious what?

I couldn’t find the right word.

“Anyway, you don’t need to push yourself.”

《Then why do you speak with me?》

“Because it’s fun… I guess.”

This time I managed to speak. I truly meant it. It was really fun speaking with Eina. That was why I was sad when I didn't hear from her for the past three days. At some point, chatting with her had become part of my life.

『Shuu-san...!!』

Eina sounded like she wanted to yell, and burst into tears on the other end of the phone.

“What’s wrong!? Did I say something I shouldn’t!?”

『You didn’t. I’m happy. It’s been… so long… since someone said something like that to me…』

“So long?”

『Shuu-san, can I… break the rules? Can I talk… about myself?』

The rules, to avoid knowing as much about Eina as I could. So I couldn’t narrow down who she was.

But…

“Yeah,” I nodded.

I wanted to know about her too.

『I don’t have a mum or dad. I did, but they died.』

My breath caught in my throat.

『So now I live with my mother’s sister, with my aunt and uncle, but we don’t get on. Even Onee-chan, my cousin, bullies me… You remember when I suddenly hung up? That was when she came into my room to yell at me for being noisy.』

“Is it safe now?”

『Yes, I’ve got my head under the covers.』

I could imagine it, a girl hiding in the covers on the phone.

《I don't... have any friends. I'm cut off and alone at school.》

“...”

《I like being alone. Having to be with everyone all the time at school is difficult, but when I said that, no one would be my friend... It's sort of painful being alone at school. Mum and dad would have said I didn't need to force myself to go to school, but my aunt and uncle say I have to, and get angry if I don't.》

She likes to daydream.

She was different from the people around her, but at school, little differences could be treated as heretical. You could call it bad luck, no one understood Eina at school.

So that's how it was.

She was always alone.

The smartphone creaked in my tightening grip.

I wanted to go right over to her and hug her.

But I couldn't. There were five years separating us.

But at least I could make her understand.

“I'm on your side. Always and forever.”

《*Hic!* Thank you!》

She burst into renewed tears.

She really did cry a lot.

But... it might be for the best to let her cry. It was fine to cry when you were happy at least, right?

I remembered her saying ‘What if I’m dead after five years?’

Eina understood. Understood that you never knew when your happiness would be destroyed.

That’s why you had to treasure the happiness you had.

*

《Umm, Shuu-san?》

She had stopped crying, and Eina’s voice whispered in my ear.

“Yeah?”

《About the script.》

“That’s right, we were talking about that.»

《Can I... write about you?》

“Eh?”

《I think I can write it now. Obviously, I want to just write it as-is, I’ll take my happiness at what you said, and how nice it feels to talk... and if I use that as my inspiration, I think I’ll be able to write it.》

“Got it. I’ll tell everyone to wait a little longer.”

“Don’t push yourself, alright? If you have any problems, don’t hesitate to talk to me about them.”

《I won’t.》

I couldn’t have seen her face.

But still, I felt like I could see her smile.

Part 3

When I woke up that morning, I'd gotten a message from Eina.

It was the script.

My entire body flushed with heat.

Shuu: Thanks, now we can start preparing for the play. Sorry for rushing you.

Eina: I just couldn't stop once I started writing!

Shuu: Eina, you really do have a talent for this.

Oddly, I didn't feel jealous. I was just happy to be able to read what she had written.

Immediately, I transferred the file to my laptop and printed a copy. Reading something in depth really was better on paper. I put the script in my bag and headed to school, sat in my seat, and immediately began to read.

As they arrived, my classmates and friends gave greetings and struck up conversations, but their voices seemed to come from far away.

The script was interesting.

Perhaps because she was conscious it was a play, it was completely in the fantasy genre. You could call it a fairy tale.

The protagonist was a teenage girl, bullied by her mother and elder sister, with no friends, living in despair. At the hopelessness of her own life, she went to end it.

However, a wounded demon suddenly appeared before her. He had been persecuted by humans, and the kind-hearted girl instinctively treated his wounds.

The demon said that he would grant her wish in thanks, and that she must pass three trials.

The first trial was to go alone to a cave in the mountains and retrieve a treasure chest.

The second was to go to her terrifying mother's room and steal the key.

And the third, the third was to use the dagger in the treasure chest and offer a sacrifice to the gods.

At that point, the demon offered his own life to grant her wish, saying:

“I am on your side. Always and forever.”

And placing the dagger in her hand. However, the girl refused.

“I can't think of a life without you. I want to be with you.”

“Then there is no choice.”

Using magic, the demon controlled her hand, and made her stab him in the chest.

The grieving girl thought of using the wish to resurrect the demon. If she did that, she would have the same life as before. No, it might even be worse, but even so... the girl resurrected the demon. Upon his resurrection, the demon was transformed into a human.

He was actually a cursed prince, and the girl's kindness along with the prince's feelings had caused a miracle, breaking the curse.

The two of them swore to love each other forever, and exchanged a kiss...

“...Yagi.”

“Yes?”

I raised my head and the English teacher was looking down at me. I'd not noticed him approach at all.

I could hear the other students laugh, apparently the lesson had started before I'd noticed.

“It's good that you're working for your club, but pay attention to your lessons too.”

“I'm sorry!”

I hurriedly took out my textbook. But, what was I supposed to do?

“Page ninety, translate the second line,” came a voice from my side.

It was the President. She was looking at me in almost a glare, with a frigid expression. I gave a shiver and opened the textbook.

Fortunately, the English wasn't too hard and I translated it without incident. The teacher moved on to the next student and I returned to Eina's script. This time with a red pen to correct it.

Finally, I had read over the entire thing at least twice.

“Ahem.”

When I raised my head, I met the eyes of the third period's maths teacher.
“Yagi, are you finished with your side-job? Then answer this question.”

The class dissolved into gales of laughter.

“Man, you really are the type to ignore your surroundings when you’re into something, huh?”

“I am?” I asked in return.

“Don’t you realise it?” Sakai shrugged. “Didn’t you notice everyone greeting you this morning? They were saying stuff like ‘awesome, the script’s here!’ or ‘we’ll have to thank Eina’. And then you just blanked them all.”

“Wah, really? I’ll need to apologise later...”

“It’s okay, everyone knows you were reading the script seriously.”

While we were talking, the class representative appeared in front of the teacher’s desk and the class meeting had begun. The script had arrived so we were genuinely beginning preparations for the play. I’d printed the script during the lunch break and given everyone a copy.

Today we would be discussing who had what part. That of course referred to the characters, but people would also be assigned to costumes, props, the set, everyone in the class should have something to do. People with nothing to do for a while would probably help with things that weren’t finished, but it was still important to assign responsibilities.

People would put themselves forward and the roles would be decided. The costumes, props, and set were all filled without issue and all the supporting roles had been decided.

I was helping with the set. I wasn’t particularly skilled with that kind of thing, but I figured I could help with the physical work.

All that was left was the lead role and her opposite, the demon prince.

It was probably because the script had a straight up romance between them, so everyone was embarrassed and didn't want to do it. There was even a kiss scene. Though obviously they wouldn't do it for real.

Then, I heard a chair move back next to me with a clatter.

The President had stood up straight and then she said.

“If no one else wants to, I’ll play the lead character.”

The class grew noisy.

“The President in the lead role...”

“She fits perfectly, right?”

“That’s great!”

It was unanimous. I thought she worked for the protagonist too, her beauty fit the impression of an ephemeral girl perfectly.

“I have a condition,” she followed, before saying something outrageous, “I nominate the literature club for the prince’s role.”

The class began to clamour.

“Yagi as her opposite?”

“Why?”

“Does he have acting experience?”

Chatter came from all over the room. I realised everyone was looking at me, and I was so surprised I couldn’t say a word.

“He’s the one that talked with the author, so he’s the one in the class that understands the play the best, and so he should have the prince’s role,” said the President, looking down at me with cold eyes. It almost seemed like she was saying it was my duty.

“If she puts it like that, why not?”

“What she’s saying makes sense.”

“Do your best, Yagi-kun!”

The class all started to fall in line with her opinion. I couldn’t refuse in that situation, and I could only nod.

Part 4

“Sup, Casanova.”

Sakai slapped me on my back on our way out of the school gates.

“...Lay off.”

Sakai was practically skipping while I trudged along.

“It’s the truth, right? The President nominated you herself, yeah?”

“What on Earth was she thinking?”

I said, before letting out a weary sigh.

“Exactly what she said, she’s the type to say everything truthfully.”

“Yeah, she always has a fair argument.”

That itself was why I was worried. Fair arguments weren’t always kind to people.

“If I had to say, I’d worry about her using you to get at a jealous guy.”

“Don’t exaggerate.”

“I’m not, she’s the most popular amongst the guys at our school isn’t she?”

“Eh, she is?”

I did think she was pretty, but I hadn’t thought she was that popular.

“You didn’t know? Well, you’re not the type to evaluate the girls I guess,”

Sakai gave a sarcastic smile, “She’s fairly popular just from being the student council President, then there’s her looks. It’d be stranger if she wasn’t popular. If we had a beauty contest, she’d easily take first.

“She’s pretty scary though, right?”

“Of course, some of the people like my boss and part of the class that have interacted directly with her say that her candidness is scary, but on the whole I think people look at her enviously.”

I was getting more and more depressed. If I acted too poorly, I’d be killed socially...

“Well, do your best. I’m cheering for you. You’ve got a thing for her too, right?”

“Bugger off.”

I wanted to think that my face heating up was my imagination.

When I got home, I messaged Eina about what had happened today. About how her script was received, and about how I’d come to have the prince’s role...

Eina: You’re the prince! Waaah, that fits perfectly!

I could tell from just the text that she was excited, but I didn't really get what she meant.

Shuu: I'm just a normal high schooler though?

Eina: It's a perfect fit. I mean, I modelled the prince after you, so having the real person play him makes me really happy.

If Eina's going that far, I'll do my best, I thought.

I immediately took out the script and read it aloud. Just reading it wouldn't let me know if I was doing well or not, so I used my phone to record myself.

Once I finished reading through, I checked the recording...

“This... is awful.”

I was so bad you couldn't have even called me a ham actor.

“I'll go buy a book on acting.”

I cycled off to a bookstore that was open at that time of night.

After school the next day, we had the initial rehearsal. My study was in vain and my acting was still tragic. Actually, it was about the same level as those in the supporting roles, so it was probably about normal for someone without experience.

But I had a leading role, so this was awful.

“There's still time, you'll manage, right?” Sakai said to me, but it was no consolation.

The President was absent, apparently she had to do some work with the cultural festival as a whole. Disappointed, I headed to the literature club's room. The end of the day was approaching, but I wanted to do some preparations for the literature club. We planned to have the room open on the day itself and distribute the book, so I had to decorate the room.

However, I couldn't move my mind from the acting and didn't get much done.

And then.

"Literature club." I started in surprise at suddenly being spoken to.

The President was standing in the doorway.

"Sorry, I'm going home now."

I apologised reflexively. It was already long past the end of the school day.

"Am I really that scary," the President sighed. She seemed to be a little down, and I felt slightly guilty.

"No, I just don't want to risk losing our room again."

"I can overlook something like this. I don't follow the rules to the letter. I know you've been preparing for both the class and your club."

"Right."

I might have misunderstood what kind of person she was.

"Hey, literature club. Do you have some time now? If you do, would you rehearse a little with me?"

Part 5

What do I do?

At that moment, I was alone with the President, walking through the twilight. We couldn't stay in the school, so we were heading to a nearby park.

We didn't talk much, since she would only say what she had to.

It was supremely uncomfortable.

I glanced at her. As usual, she was frowning. She really was amazing for managing to look beautiful even with that expression.

But would we actually be able to practice in this atmosphere?

A metaphorical life-ring was thrown out to me as we arrived when my phone vibrated with a message from Eina.

Eina: Evening, how are the cultural festival preparations going?

Shuu: Good timing! Are you free now? Can I call?

Eina: You can, but why?

Shuu: I'm actually about to practice with the President, but... it's uncomfortable.

Eina: Uncomfortable? Why?

Shuu: It looks like the President hates me.

Eina: You're practising together even though she hates you?

Shuu: Yeah. I'm not good at acting, and she was busy with the student council. She's not the type to mix personal feelings with business.

Eina: She sounds serious.

Shuu: Yeah, but she can't hide her bad mood, so could you listen to us practice and give some comments. It'd be easier than doing it on our own.

Eina: Got it!

“Literature club, what are you doing?”

“I was talking to the writer, she’ll listen to us practice. Only over the phone though, that okay?”

“It is. I’d like to hear an objective opinion too.”

I called Eina and put the phone on speaker mode.

《Good evening. It’s nice to meet you, President.》

“It’s nice to meet you too, Eina-san. I suppose that works?”

《Yes! I hope we get along!》

I put my things and phone on a bench and faced the President with the script in hand.

“Let’s go from the top then, first is the girl’s appearance...”

Suddenly, her expression changed.

“It’s painful, so painful. Maybe it would be easier if I was dead...”

Her expression changed to one of heartbreak. As if she were about to cry, but was desperately holding back the tears.

She was just looking downcast and haltingly saying her lines, but her sadness and pain really were conveyed.

《It’s your turn, Shuu-san.》

I came back to myself at Eina’s voice from the phone.

“Ah, sorry. ‘Young lady, might I ask of you a simple favour? Would you lend me your hand? My leg has been injured and I cannot stand.’”

We finished the scene and the President looked steadily at me.

“I know what you want to say, I think it was awful too.”

《Not at all! It felt very good, I thought it was good!》

Eina’s kindness actually felt all the more painful.

“Well done. You’ve learnt the lines properly, you’re thinking about the right gestures too. All you need now is to practice and refine the rough edges.”

The President telling me that calmed me down a little.

《You were amazing though, President.》

“Do you have acting experience?” I asked, but she shook her head. “Are you a genius then?”

“...It’s because I practised a lot.”

She looked away.

Did she mean she stayed up all night? She should be awfully busy as the festival approached.

“Let’s go through each scene. I’ll give you an example so use that as a reference too.”

An hour later:

“Let’s take a break,” I suggested, “I’m going to get a drink, do you want anything?”

“A cola,” she murmured in response.

“Okay.”

I left my phone on the bench and walked to a nearby shop. Because it was dinner time, the cashier was crowded and it took longer than I thought to buy the drinks. Once I was done, I ran back to the park.

The President was sat on the bench talking to my phone.

“I know he’s not a bad person. He’s a hard worker and everything, I just get nervous when we talk.”

Rather than her usual dignified air, the President seemed like a normal girl, which was a new experience for me.

《Well then, Shuu-san. I’ll be going now.》

“We’re not going to keep practising?”

《Sorry, something urgent came up! I’m really sorry! Make sure to walk the President home, okay?》

“Eh?”

Wait a minute, go home together? With the President?

Wouldn’t that be really uncomfortable? But Eina had already hung up.

“What are we doing, President? Want to keep going?”

“I need to get home too. I’ve got a curfew.”

“Got it.”

“Are you really going to walk me home?”

“Well, it *is* late.”

“...Thank you,” she muttered.

We walked off, drinking from our cans.

“What did you talk about with Eina?”

“School and things.”

“I see.”

We both fell into silence.

Damn, this was indeed really uncomfortable.

I didn’t know what to talk about, and as usual, she didn’t seem like she was about to speak to me anytime soon.

Why did Eina say I had to walk her home. We’re not lovers or anything. The next time we spoke ended up being when we arrived at her house.

“Huh, is this...”

I couldn’t help but start to ask.

We had arrived at an orphanage. It was a small building that looked like a small school on the face of it.

“Are you surprised?” She asked.

“A little.”

“Don’t make that face.” What kind of face was I making? “I chose this for myself. I had some problems at home. I much prefer this lifestyle. Well, it’d be a lie to say that there wasn’t anything I dislike about it, but it’s much better than it was before.”

“What will you do about university?”

“I’m planning on taking the exams for the nearby university. If I pass then I can be exempt from tuition fees because of the household income, I should be able to get a scholarship with my results as well. It has dorms, so I should be able to deal with living costs. I’ll work to make up the difference and do my best until I graduate. It will be hard to pay it back, but I really do want to go to university.”

The President looked at the orphanage building as she spoke. Her face was strong, refined, and above all, beautiful.

I really don't know anything about her.

"Literature club, do your best in the festival," said the President, with a much gentler face than usual.

"Of course."

"And... thank you, for walking me home."



The President disappeared through the door.
Her last words were nearly soundless.
I smiled, thinking I wanted to know more about her.

Part 6

Night had fallen and I was relaxing in my room after a meal and a bath when a message arrived from Eina.

Eina: Shuu-san, did you know? Fufufu...

Shuu: Know what?

Eina: That the President doesn't hate you at all?

Shuu: Huh?

Eina: We talked about a lot of things when you went to get the drinks, but it seems that the President treats you harshly because she's nervous. Haha, being popular sure is tough!

My face flushed with heat.

Eina: This is a confession event! When you're going home from the festival or something! It's wonderful, isn't it? It's like you're bound by fate with your co-star.

What is this feeling...

When I was told the President might not actually hate me, and that she might even like me, I was started panicking, confused.

And then I realised. I was panicked that Eina would misunderstand my feelings. Eina thought that I liked the President, and was honestly supporting me in it.

But that seemed too lonely to me.

I was shocked, why did I think that? I hadn't even seen Eina's face, and she lived five years in the past, and we couldn't even meet...

Shuu: I just look up to the President. She's pretty, but I don't think I exactly like her, so I won't confess.

Eina: Eh? I-I see... that's good.

Shuu: Good?

Eina: Ah, nothing.

We both stopped messaging for a while.

Shuu: Let's go to sleep.

Eina: Let's, good night.

Shuu: Night.

Part 7

The next fortnight flew by. That morning, I went to school early and we practised for the play.

I was half asleep through class, and after school, we had another rehearsal. While we rehearsed, our classmates were around the room making costumes and props.

Suddenly, a huge crash sounded along with the noise of breaking glass. The sound team were picking out music and sound effects.

There were even people making spotlights with torches and cellophane.

This kind of scene was happening all throughout the school. The entire place was getting into the swing of the cultural festival.

To use a common saying, they were fulfilling days.

But for some reason, I felt dissatisfied.

I didn't know why. I had an odd lonely feeling, like a small hole had opened up in my heart.

However, there was so much to do that I didn't even have the time to think about it. I had to spend any free time I had binding the books for the literature club.

And then it was the day before the festival, Friday.

After school, I figured that the class could do without me for a while and headed to the clubroom to decorate it. It was already completely dark outside but for today only, the teachers wouldn't say anything if we were here late.

When I arrived, Ruka-senpai was already there.

“Good timing! Shuu-kun, can you get this?”

She was on top of the desk, trying to hang decorations on the blackboard, but she couldn't quite reach. She was stretching out so far that it looked like she might fall.

“Leave it to me, Senpai.”

I switched places with her on the desk and hung out the decorations.

“Where are the other two?”

“They already left. They’ve got prep school. I wish their prep school would read the mood though.”

“It’s unavoidable, the exams won’t wait. Will you be okay?”

“Hmm, I actually have prep school soon too.”

“Then go. I’ll finish the rest.”

“Are you sure? I can skip...”

“It’s okay, it’s just the decoration left.”

She didn’t look too happy about it, maybe she’d been hoping I would give her the excuse to skip.

“Yeah. Thanks. Oh yeah, I’ll definitely come watch the play tomorrow! Good luck!”

“Thank you, but what will we do here then?”

“I’ll ask Kobayashi-sensei to cover for us, she *is* our adviser, so it’s fine! See you!”

Ruka-senpai left with the flopping of her footsteps.

“Now then, let’s finish up quickly.”

The others had mostly finished already, I just had to create the venue.

I put several desks together like a bar, lay a cloth over the top of them and arranged the bound books on top of that.

It wasn’t just the books for the festival, we also put out older books too for anyone interested.

I finished and let out a long breath, looking out of the windows. The school had already fallen quiet, most of the students had probably gone home.

The sky was pitch-black, with stars dotting it.

I wonder if Eina is looking at the same stars, I thought idly.

The Eina I talked to was the Eina from five years in the past, so she couldn't be looking at these stars. But... what about the current Eina?

Was she, on the same planet, at the same time, looking up at these stars.

I took out my phone. I'd not had any messages. I was really busy at the moment and couldn't reply much, so Eina and I hadn't talked much recently. Sliding my finger over the touchscreen, I called her.

It rang once and she picked up.

《Hello, this is Eina.》

“It’s Shuu.”

《Good evening. It’s the real thing tomorrow, are you already home?》

“No, I’m still at school.”

《Wah, that’s tough.》

“Well, I’m about to go home.”

《It sounds like a fulfilling school life!》

Eina was completely right. Recently, my life had been surprisingly fulfilling.

“Yeah, it is. Practising for the play and preparing for the literature club is fun, but,” having heard Eina’s voice, I knew why I felt lonely, “I’m sure it’d be more fun if you were here too.”

Eina wasn't here. I didn't know her face, her name, or even her age, but I still felt that she should be next to me. I wanted to meet her.

But we couldn't meet.

Because she lived five years in the past...

If we were just a long distance apart, we could still meet. I could get the train, or even a plane.

But the interval in time was insurmountable.

《...I would want to meet you if we could,》 her clear soprano entered my ears, quiet and lonely, 《I wanted to prepare for the cultural festival with you, and to practice the play with you.》

I thought that maybe Eina felt the same as me, and I quietly held her voice in my heart.

“Thank you, Eina.”

《It's okay.》

We were silent for a while, utterly wordless. But my heart was at ease, maybe because I knew I was connected to her through my phone.

She wasn't beside me, but I didn't feel alone in the slightest.

“Say.”

《Umm...》 we spoke together before falling into silence waiting for the other to continue.

“Go ahead.”

《Uhh, When is your birthday?》

“Saturday next week.”

《Eh, it's that soon!? What do I do...?》

“What do you do?”

《Uh, ah, I was talking to myself. Ah, that's right, then why don't we go out together next Saturday?》

“Go out together?”

I didn't understand what she meant.

《Of course, we won't be able to meet. But if we go to the same place, it's sort of like we've gone out together.》

“Ah, let's do that.”

I checked my watch.

I really did have to head home soon.

“I'm hanging up then, I have to go home.”

《Right.》

“...”

《...Um, aren't you hanging up.》

“I was waiting for you to.”

We both laughed.

《Then on three?》

“On three.”

《One.》

“Two.”

《“Three.”》

Our voices mixed with the electronic tone as we hung up. Even after hanging up, my gaze lingered on my phone for a while.

Part 8

It was the day of the festival. I did some preparations for the club and then headed to the classroom.

The classroom was a tumult of noise as people bustled about doing makeup, preparing costumes, and coordinating lighting equipment.

I searched for the President, wanting to go over things one more time, but I couldn't find her.

"Is the President still with the student council?" I asked Sakai.

He made an unusually serious face as he answered.

"She still hasn't come to school. I asked the student council too, but they haven't seen her either."

I made a mixed noise of shock and doubt.

"Hasn't she contacted you?" He asked me.

"Nah, I don't have her number..."

I slumped.

And then:

"President! You're a bit late!"

A girl cried out from the door. I looked to see the President slowly entering the room. But she only gave the girl a glance and didn't answer.

No, she did, her mouth moved.

However, her voice didn't reach me. I had a bad feeling about this.

"President, are you okay?"

"I'm okay."

She approached and I could faintly hear her voice.

But it wasn't her usual clear soprano, her voice was hoarse, and if I hadn't seen her speak, I wouldn't have known whose voice it was.

Her eyes were swollen and her cheeks were flushed. She obviously had a fever. Even the way she walked looked more like she was being dragged along.

"You're obviously not."

"Sorry, I didn't sleep last night and I'm tired. It looks like I caught a cold as well," she confessed.

"You didn't sleep, why?"

"I got nervous when I was thinking about the performance today."

"So you get nervous too..."

"Did you think I was a robot or something?"

She frowned in displeasure, puffing out her cheeks,

"No, just because you're always so at ease addressing everyone during assemblies and such."

"That's because I'm always trying my best," she managed to get out, before breaking into a hacking cough.

What should I do? It didn't seem like she couldn't speak, but acting with that voice would be quite difficult.

"We'll have to use a substitute. Is there anyone..." the moment I began to speak, the girls all looked away, "Oi, this is an emergency."

"Obviously none of us want to," one of the girls stepped forward as a representative, "one of us stand in for the President? Everyone's coming to

see *her*, aren't they? If one of us went out they'd go like 'what's with this ham' or something like that, no way."

"That's right! They'd shout at us for wasting their time if some other girl came out!"

Sakai added.

Immediately afterwards, he was dragged away by the girls.

"Then we'll have to have you do it, but it's too tough with that voice."

"Hey, literature club, can you contact Eina-san?" The President asked hoarsely.

"Today's a Saturday, so I should be able to."

"Would you?"

I called Eina, just as she asked.

《Hello, Eina here.》

"Eina-san?"

《...Who is it?》

"It's the President," I told her.

《Ehh!?》 She let out a confused noise. 《What happened to your voice!?》

"I caught a cold. And so, I have a request..."

《If I can do anything to help, let me know!》

The President's expression seemed to ease as if Eina's words put her at ease.

And then:

“Thank you. Then would you do the voice for the lead role?”

She said with a calm expression.

《Ehh?》

“Huh?”

We said in unison.

“Wait a minute, when you say just the voice, you mean have her do it by phone?”

“That’s what I mean.”

“Won’t she obviously get found out?”

“That’s fine. What about, the protagonist was injured, and mute, so the demon uses magic so we can hear her?”

《I don’t think it would seem unnatural that way...》

If the original author said so, then that would work within the fiction.

“Thank you. Then we’ll have the narrator say that later.”

《Right, wait, that’s not the problem! I can’t act!》

“I told you when we were in the park with literature club, didn’t I? ‘You try practising too.’”

《You did, but I’m no good at all...》

“No, you can do it. Or more accurately, no one but you can do it. The protagonist is you, right? You don’t need to act, just say the words.”

《But... I might end up speaking in a monotone...》

“That’s fine. She’s lacking in feelings and suffering. I know that you can do it,” the President said, before she started to choke.

“Eina, you can hear how she is, will you do it?”

《Okay, I’ll do my best!》

“And we’re ready. Right, you look cool, Yagi-kun.”

The girl in charge of costumes and makeup slapped my shoulder.

“...Thanks.”

“Are you nervous?”

“I seriously am.”

“Geez, use the President as an example.”

I took a sidelong glance at her.

She was already dressed up as a shabby girl and looked ephemeral, as if she might disappear at any moment.

Even dressed up in such torn up clothes, she was still charming.

She was there quietly, with her eyes on the script, going over her last checks.

“Eina, it’s almost time, are you ready?”

I spoke to my phone where it had been placed by the sound system.

《I am! Leave it to me!》

She returned energetically with a voice containing no hint of nervousness.

I can’t be the only one nervous.

I let out a long sigh and straightened myself.

“Right, we’re starting!” Came the class representative’s yell as the President ran on stage from the wings.

A cheer greeted her onto the stage.

Eina's line echoed throughout the hall.

《It's painful, so painful. Maybe it would be easier if I was dead...》

Even though her voice was going through a sound system, it was still beautiful.

It was a perfectly clear, lovely soprano that was nice on the ears.

And then I headed onto the stage.

The classroom had been remodelled into a hall and was filled to capacity and I was overwhelmed by the greater number of spectators than I had expected.

“Young lady, might I ask of you a simple favour? Would you lend me your hand? My leg has been injured and I cannot stand.”

I was then on the stage for the rest of the play.

Throughout the first and second trials, the President and I, along with Eina, played our parts... with no major mistakes.

And then, finally, it was the third trial.

“I am on your side. Always and forever.”

As I spoke my line, I handed over the dagger prop to the girl, to the President.

The President's mouth opened.

However, I couldn't hear Eina's voice.

Silence fell over the hall.

I glanced into the wings, and our classmates were panicking.

The audience didn't seem to have realised anything was wrong yet.

What's wrong, Eina? Why aren't you saying anything...?

I went to speak but suddenly gave up. I shouldn't think of Eina's feelings, I should think of the character on the stage's feelings.

What would the girl be thinking?

She'd be happy wouldn't she? At feeling his love.

And then it came together. She was so happy she couldn't get her feelings out.

So...

"I... am on your side."

No sooner had I repeated the line, tears welled from the President's eyes. Those tears might have been an illusion I was under. It was as if Eina was in front of me, standing with me on the stage.

I felt sorry for the President saying it like that, but I saw the President as Eina.

《I can't think of a life without you. I want to be with you.》 Eina gave her line in response to mine.

Now we were heading straight for the happy end.

"Man, that was brilliant."

Once the play had ended, Sakai came bounding in from the wings.

"Really?"

"Yeah, the audience were really into it. Also here, the recording."

Sakai handed over an SD card.

“Thanks, you’re a saviour.”

Sakai had recorded the play on his phone. He was a reporter for the newspaper club, so he had to watch it himself, so I had him record it at the same time.

“Oh yeah, why’d you not get Eina-chan to come? It would have been better in person, wouldn’t it?” Sakai asked. He was probably asking such a leading question because he wanted to know who she was.

“Who knows.”

“As tight-lipped as ever, huh. You’re not going to let anything slip.”

“Of course not.”

Even if I would, I don’t know anything about her.

“I’m going to the literature club for a while,” I said and left Sakai behind. I rushed towards the clubroom to shake off the heart-rending loneliness. On the way, I sent the recording to Eina.

After a while, I got a reply.

Eina: That was amazing, I’m so impressed! It’s incredible to see something I wrote on stage! I’m a bit embarrassed my voice is in there too though...

Shuu: Was it not how you imagined?

Eina: It was exactly like I imagined it! No, it was even better! Since...

Shuu: Since?

Eina: I saw your face like this.

That's right, this was the first time she'd seen my face.

Shuu: Did I ruin your impression?

Eina: Not at all! It was sort of... exactly like I thought... It was just like you!

At that Eina-like comment, I felt my heart warm.

*

It was the last day of the festival.

Our school had an after-festival, limited to current students. They used a stage in the gym, had a volunteer band and a pro-wrestling show in the hall.

I wasn't the type to go and party, so I was sipping a drink in the corner of the hall, absently watching the festivities. There were many others doing the same, so I didn't feel alienated.

"Literature club." Someone clapped me on the shoulder, it was the President.

"Is this okay, aren't the student council managing this?"

"It's not like I do all of the work," she replied as loudly as she could. The band was boozing through the hall, so I felt kind of sorry for her.

I gestured outside with a glance and she nodded. We left the gym and went behind the hall.

The night wind was pleasant.

“I’m really sorry,” the President started as we walked, “I should have paid better attention to my health.”

“Don’t worry about it, you were busy. Besides, you managed to do the play even in that condition, you’re amazing.”

The President had ended up performing twice, the morning before and that afternoon. On the second time, her voice had gotten much better so she had spoken her lines herself.

“I-I am...?”

“Yeah. You didn’t bother anyone, and even Eina seemed like she had fun.”

It was unfair to the President, but I was glad to be able to participate in the cultural festival with Eina, and she was happy for it too. It was a lucky break for us. Of course, I wouldn’t say that to the President, I couldn’t tell her that her getting a cold she had to struggle through was a ‘good’ thing, and it would have been rude to her acting too. But I really did want to let her know that she hadn’t caused any trouble.

“Thank you for your amazing acting, you really did well,” I said, and she looked away, her face slightly red.

“That goes from me too. Will you give my thanks to Eina too? I’ll be going now!”

The President ran off as if hiding her face.

She is cute sometimes, I thought.

I didn’t go back into the hall and instead stood in the night wind for a while.



Intermission 2 — Preparations to go to the Ball

Being able to be part of the play was like a dream.

And I'd be acting with Shuu...

Of course, I wasn't acting on my own, but I think being able to break through the five years between us was the most important thing. Luckily, my cousin, aunt and uncle were all out on the Saturday. They were back the next day, but it seemed like the President had recovered by then.

Now then. It was Monday now. It was time to execute the mission I should have carried out on Saturday.

I took my cousin's Wi-Fi hotspot.

My phone had no contract, so I couldn't really connect to the internet outside and because of that, I couldn't go out with Shuu-san. Just going somewhere there was free Wi-Fi would be boring so I borrowed the hotspot.

I didn't steal it, I was just borrowing it. Let me just explain, even though she went in tears to her mother to get her to take out the contract, she barely used it.

You might think that I should ask to borrow it, but she'd never let me, if anything she'd definitely not let me because I asked.

I left for home a little early that day. Onee-chan was with her club and my aunt and uncle were at work. It was fine.

I'd used it before when I went to meet Shuu-san at C Station and I'd borrowed it quietly then and hadn't been found out. I'm sure I won't this time either.

I got home and sneaked into her room still with my bag on.

She had a pretty curtain, a cute desk, lots of stuffed toys, idol posters...

Her room had everything mine didn't. I gave those things a sidelong glance as I put my head into the wardrobe.

The hotspot was thrown into the chaos within a paper bag.

I don't need a pretty room.

If I had Shuu-san, I could live. Everything would be fine.

I hid the hotspot and charger in my pocket and left the room.

This was my pumpkin carriage.

Chapter 3 — The Chimes of Midnight

Part 1

《Sorry to call so late,》 the call from Eina came on the Friday night, the night before my birthday, 《I wanted to talk about tomorrow.》

“Sure.”

《First are the things you need to take...》

“I need to take things? Don’t I just need my phone?”

《A spade is just as important.》

“Why?”

《Fufufu, it’s a secret. And as far as when goes, would the afternoon be okay?》

“That’s fine, let’s go after we’ve both eaten.”

《Eating while we were on the phone *would* be a little rude,》 we laughed together, 《So for the place... would in front of C Station be okay? That’s not too far from you, is it?》

“Yeah, that’s fine. Why a spade though?”

《I already told you that it’s a secret.》

“That just makes me more curious.”

《You’ll understand tomorrow... Ah, happy birthday!》

“Eh?” I looked at the clock and saw that the hand had ticked past midnight, “Thank you.”

It was the first time I’d been speaking with someone when my birthday arrived. When the date changed, I was normally lying dreaming in my room.

My chest feels kind of warm.

And thus, I turned seventeen.

*

As I stood in front of C Station the next day, my phone buzzed in my grip.
“Hello,” I said into the headset microphone.

《Hello, Shuu-san.》

My heart began to race as I heard her voice from the earphones. I was already used to her voice, but hearing it directly in my ear made it seem like we were huddled together.

“...Hey,” I calmed myself so it wouldn’t show in my voice and gave a simple greeting.

We set off about the town. We went to a bookstore first, we’d chosen a famous place, on the top floor of a big department store.

“You read fairy tales, right, Eina?”

《I do, I love them!》

“Do you have any recommendations?”

《Let’s see, one that I can think of that would still be sold in five years is...》 she recited the name of a famous fairy tale picture book, 《but you’ve already read it, right?》

“I might have read it when I was small. Well, since I’m here, I’ll buy it.”

《Then do you have any recommendations?》

“Maybe *The Door into Summer?*” I suggested.

《Ah, I haven’t read that! I haven’t heard of it either,》 that was unexpected, 《I wonder if it’s in the library...》

“It’s famous, so they should have it?”

I wondered why she wasn’t buying it.

《Ah, I do know that buying it is better, but, um, I don’t have much money I can use freely...》

“Ah, that’s fine, right?”

Everyone had their own circumstances, so I didn’t ask any more than that.

We carried on and were going to go and look at clothes.

《Let’s go to Proca then!》

Proca was a chain of fashion boutiques that were spreading throughout the country.

But...

“Eh, Proca...?”

I tilted my head, questioning if there was a Proca around here and then immediately realised that there was in Eina’s time, but not in mine.

“Ahh, it’s a bit hard to say, but there’s no Proca here.”

《There’s not? Eh!? They closed down!?’》

“Yeah.”

《No way... I dreamed of going to Proca to buy things with my friends...》

“Sorry.”

I couldn’t help but feel sorry for crushing her hopes.

《No, it’s okay, I can go to a different town to go to a Proca. But... what a shame... I really wanted to go to Proca with you and look at the clothes, have some tea in their cafe and do a lot...》

“That’s a shame... let’s go for some tea for now.”

I was slightly uneasy that the cafe would have gone as well.

We went into a suitable cafe chain. We went to the same place, but the name had changed. I bought a coffee to go and sat on a bench in a nearby plaza.

“A lot changes in five years, huh?”

《Everything changing makes me feel a bit lonely.》

“There are things that haven’t changed.”

《Like what?》

“Hmm, C Station’s name?”

《That changing wouldn’t really matter.》

“True.”

《Ah, that’s right. Speaking of things that don’t change... Shuu-san, why was Cinderella’s glass slipper left behind?》 I didn’t really know what she was asking, so I was slow to reply, so Eina explained, 《It was because the spell would break with the chimes of midnight, right? Cinderella was always wearing tatty clothes, so wouldn’t her glass slipper have turned back into a normal one?》

That's right actually.

"I'd never thought about it."

《I've always been curious about it. I've got a feeling that it wasn't by chance.》

"Maybe the prince's feelings kept the magic?" That was my first, simplest thought, "From the point of view of the prince, Cinderella suddenly disappearing would have been a tragedy. Right? The person he thought was the only one for him vanished, so his feelings of wanting to meet her again might have reached the glass slipper?"

However, when I finished, I began to think that that might have really been the case. I mean, if I was the prince... Eina would have been my Cinderella then.

I'm sure it was painful. If I couldn't message and talk to Eina, I'm not sure I'd recover.

《You're surprisingly romantic, aren't you?》

"Disappointed?"

《No, it's wonderful. Hmm, the prince's feelings huh? Cinderella would be happy to meet someone that loved her so much.》

We wandered around the town for a while. Walking around and talking to Eina was fun, but I ended up thinking about what would happen if we really met...

We'd meet in front of the station, I'd say 'Hey,' and she'd reply with 'Hello'. Then we'd walk off together, we'd walk around town for a while and

go to a cafe. Eina likes sweet things, so she might ask for a parfait or something. It might be nice to go to karaoke after that. What kind of songs would she sing?

I want to go around bookstores and talk about popular books with her. Not over the phone, but with the girl in front of me.

All of that is far away from us though.

《Shuu-san? What's wrong, you went quiet.》

Eina's voice brought me back to myself. We'd come to a high spot and were looking over the view.

“Ah, sorry, I was just thinking.”

《Jeez, don't go off on your own, it makes me lonely,》 she was pretending to be angry, but it wasn't scary at all, 《if you do that, I won't give you your present.》

“...Present?”

《Curious?》

“Yeah... Wait, how?”

《Fufufu, dig under that tree, by the base of the biggest one.》

I followed her instructions and used the spade to dig.

The spade hit something with a dull *thunk*.

I moved the dirt aside and found something that looked like a sweet tin. I picked it up and opened it to see a phone strap inside, with a little, stuffed figure on the end.

The stuffed figure was the demon I had played.



“Did you make this yourself?”

《I did. I’m clumsy, so I’m sorry it’s not very good, but...》

She spoke like she was ducking her head. It was a little misshapen and the stitching was rough. But I could tell this was a gift from the heart.

“Nah, I’m really happy with it. Thank you, I’ll look after it.”

《Ehehe.》

There were five years between us. But even so, we lived on the same planet.

Part 2

“Shuu-kun, that strap’s cute, huh?”

It was about a week later on the Friday. I was sitting in the clubroom waiting for any new applicants that would never arrive, reading sluggishly. Ruka-senpai was across from me, studying.

We’d been there for about an hour. Suddenly, she had seen my phone on the desk and asked about it.

“It was a present, from Eina.”

“You mean that writer?” I nodded, “Do you meet her often?”

She put her pencil down and leaned forwards, completely in gossip mode. I put my book down and looked at her.

“We’ve never actually met.”

“Eh? How do you know her then? A social network?”

“Yeah, something like that,” I admitted.

“My, you younglings sure are amazing nowadays, this little old lady is ever so surprised.”

“What’s with that ‘little old lady’, you’re only a year older than me!”

“Ahaha. Well, jokes aside... haven’t you thought of meeting her? You seem to get on pretty well, wouldn’t it be more fun to talk in person?”

“We... can’t meet. There are reasons.”

“By that, you *do* want to meet.”

“Eh?”

She’d caught me off guard, how did she know?

“If you didn’t, you wouldn’t have said you *can’t* meet, right?” She smiled gently.

“...Yeah, if the circumstances weren’t an issue, I’d want to meet her.”

We’d actually tried, but we couldn’t.

She tilted her head in consideration with a thoughtful noise before suddenly asking.

“Shuu-kun, you like her, don’t you?”

She spoke casually, as if it was just a continuation of the conversation.

But the moment I heard her words, my heart froze.

Do I... like Eina...?

The instant I put it into words, I was conscious of everything about her, and my head went white. I couldn’t say a word. Ruka-senpai looked at me in amusement and then let out a small sigh.

“I see, so I lost to someone you haven’t even seen.”

“...Lost?” I managed to get out. I couldn’t follow the conversation.



“Don’t worry about it, I was talking to myself. Hey, if you like her, you need to meet her and let her know how you feel. You’ll definitely regret it if not.”

“There’s a lot of reasons we can’t.”

“But you like her, right?”

“...I do,” I admitted.

I thought it would be nice to have her at my side when I was preparing for the cultural festival. When we were talking on my birthday, I really did want her beside me, and when I received my present, I really wanted her to have given it to me in person. I’m sure I thought like that because I liked her.

“You want to be sure who she is, right?”

“...I do,” I said again, after a longer pause this time.

“Right, then your wonderful Senpai will help. So, why can’t you meet?”

“Will you listen without laughing? I’m... going to say something that sounds unbelievable,” I’d already given up, I’d tell her everything. I might have lost my normal judgement, but impulses are an important part of life, “Eina doesn’t actually live in the present, she’s from five years ago. I don’t know how, but my phone is connected to that time and I can talk with her.”

Her expression was amazing at my words, her mouth was slightly agape and it looked like her mind had shut down.

“Sorry, can you say that one more time?”

“I’ll say it over and over, Eina lives in the past. I live in the present, so we can’t actually meet.”

“I’m just checking, but that’s not just an excuse you’re giving me, right?”

“See, you don’t believe me.”

“Oi, don’t sulk. Who’d believe something like that right away! Ah! I don’t mean I don’t believe you, just let me think,” she said, and folded her arms.

“...Well, it fits I guess. You’re hiding the truth about Eina because you don’t think anyone will believe you if you said anything?”

“That’s about right.”

“Got it. I believe you. You’re not one to make up strange lies anyway,” she said and smiled at me, and it felt like a load had been taken off my back, “then why can’t you meet her from now? Though it does mean making her wait for five years.”

“That’s because Eina doesn’t want to meet me five years from when she is, she doesn’t want to know her future.”

“Hmmm, I’d just be interested in what happened to me in the future.”

“Eina is pessimistic so she thinks her future might be worse and is scared of knowing it. She thinks I wouldn’t hide it if something terrible had happened to her, so she asked not to meet.”

“I see.”

She nodded.

“And so, I really respect her for it, but...”

“But you want to meet her, right?”

“Right.”

“Then our goal is to find out who Eina is without her knowing, and go and meet her,” then she slumped, “but how do we do that?”

“I don’t know either.”

“We need some help.”

I only knew one person knowledgeable about things like that. The newspaper club’s ace, Sakai. He was skilled at gathering information, so he should be able to find her.

Part 3

“Finding someone? Leave it to me,” Sakai nodded once we went to his clubroom and explained things to him, “I have a condition though, I’d like to print an interview with Eina-chan.”

“Eh, I can’t say yes without her permission.”

“That’s impossible, right? We’re searching for her without her knowing after all,” Ruka-senpai supported me.

Sakai paused for thought before continuing.

“Then promise me that you’ll persuade her. Obviously I don’t want you to pressure her, she doesn’t need to give a picture, just the interview is fine. She’s so famous after all, her debut work captured the gossip of the entire school and her play made the cultural festival what it was! If we can get an exclusive interview, we’ll be known throughout the world!”

Sakai was practically frothing at the mouth and I was lost. The interview would be dependent on Eina, so...

“Shuu-kun, you can just say okay for now,” Ruka-senpai gave me a strained smile, “you’ve got a serious personality, so you might worry about it.”

“Okay, I’ll try and persuade her.”

“Ta, ta, then let’s get while the getting’s good, let’s start,” Sakai put a tablet on the desk, “‘Eina’ is her internet handle, right?”

“Probably.”

“Then let’s check places like Twitter.”

I was surprised I hadn’t thought of it myself actually. I’d rushed off wanting to meet her, but hadn’t thought things through myself.

Sakai put ‘Eina’ in the search field and about ten accounts showed up on the screen.

“Huh, there’s quite a few,” Ruka-senpai muttered in wonder.

“Roughly half of them are foreigners, so it’s probably one of these two,” While Sakai spoke, he opened tabs for both users’ timelines, “So? Anything look familiar? Or anything that matches something she said?”

“Ah!” I pointed at the one, “This might be her. She wrote about last week.”

Eina @eina002

I’m going out with S-san tomorrow.

Eina @eina002

I got his present ready.

Eina @eina002

I’msonervous!

“S-san is you?”

“Probably...”

I scrolled a little further.

Eina @eina002

I can't... write the script... I t ' s o v e r .

Eina @eina002

S-san praised me for the script! I'm so happy!

Eina @eina002

I saw the play! S-san was so cool!

“Eina-chan’s so sweet.”

“I’m sort of jealous.”

Sakai and Ruka-senpai said respectively from my sides, and I knew my face had gone red as well.

“Anyway, this is most likely her account. What do we do next then?”

I feigned calmness and asked.

“We analyse her tweets and look for personal information,” Sakai slid his finger over the screen, whizzing through the timeline, “Oh, she uses a normal blog too, let’s have a look.”

He opened it up in a separate window and several entries, more detailed than the tweets, were shown on the screen.

“Rejoice, Yagi. Eina-chan is awfully net illiterate.”

“Why would I rejoice about that?” I grew uneasy.

“It’s good news for finding her. For example, take this picture...” he expanded a picture of a cherry tree, it was a pretty picture, with the tree in

full bloom with pink flowers, “this picture still has GPS data in it. And the title’s ‘A snap from near home’. That lets us know that she lives near a cherry tree. The address is...” he pulled up the location on a map, it was one station down from C Station, and seemed rather rural.

“So that’s how a stalker finds someone...” Ruka-senpai backed away from him.

“Hey, Ruka-senpai! I won’t abuse this! Right, Yagi?”

“Sorry, I think it’s stalker-ish as well.”

“So mean! You’re the same then!”

“Shuu-kun is different! They’re in love!”

“Kuh... What’s with this discrimination!?” Sakai ground his teeth. “This won’t stop me... This is all for an interview with Eina-chan...!”

He really was putting the effort in, and I decided to do my best to ask her for an interview as well.

“There’s a lot of pictures, let’s text-mine her tweets... Oh, a sports day at elementary school? There’s only one school with a sports day then, so... Oh! She uploaded a picture from a window!!” Sakai left us behind for a while, immersing himself in the internet, and then...

“This is probably where she lives,” he pointed at a house on the street view. It would take about half an hour to get there, we could probably check it out. “It looks like it’s the Yokota family’s house. Five years ago, they had a middle schooler and an elementary schooler. I don’t know about now though. Eina-chan doesn’t have any posts since October five years ago, so I can’t narrow it down any more. Maybe she got better habits after that.”

“This... is Eina’s house...” I shook as I looked at the picture, “Thank you, really. I didn’t think you’d find her so quickly.”

“I’m going to be a journalist, so that much was a piece of cake,” Sakai proclaimed proudly.

“Careful not to get killed if you stick your neck too far into some politician’s corruption...”

“I’d be happy to be involved in something so big!”

Ruka-senpai seemed genuinely worried, but Sakai brushed her concerns aside triumphantly.

“So, what do we do next?” I asked.

“We go and check. We haven’t done anything to be guilty of.”

Sakai declared confidently.

No, we really have though, I thought worriedly.

Part 4

It was the next day, Saturday, and Ruka-senpai, Sakai, and I were headed to the Yokota residence.

I bought some sweets in front of C Station.

“What’d you buy in the end?” Asked Sakai.

“Eina likes sweet things, so some dorayaki,” I answered him.

“You really love her,” said Ruka-senpai, and my cheeks flushed.

We got off the train at the next station and walked for five minutes through the quiet suburbs before arriving at the Yokota house.

I stood in front of their intercom and took a deep breath.

Ruka-senpai and Sakai both took a step back and waited for me, not urging me to push the button.

Slowly, I stretched out my finger to the button.

I wonder what she looks like?

What shape are her eyebrows?

What colour are her eyes?

I wonder if she's pale or tanned.

Is she tall or short?

How long is her hair?

What colour is it?

She was always smiling, what was her smile like?

I pushed the button.

A pleasant chime rang out.

『Yes?』

An adult woman's voice answered.

“Is there an Eina-san there?”

『Eina...?』

The woman seemed confused.

Was it pointless asking after her handle? She might not have told her family the name she used.

Or do we have the wrong place?

Maybe she's already moved because five years have passed.

『Did she write a story?』

“Yes! She did!”

I leaned forwards.

However, the speaker fell silent. 《I'm sorry to say so, but she isn't here.》

“She's not? Did she move?”

《Umm, wait a moment.》

The speaker buzzed as it turned off, and after a while, a woman came out. She looked to be around twenty. Her gaze was sharp, and she seemed like a rather cold woman.

She gave a small bow.

“I'm Eina's cousin. It's nice to meet her friends.”

“It's good to meet you too.”

I greeted her in turn, wondering to myself if this was the cousin that had bullied her.

“Please, let's talk inside.”

She invited us in, and all three of us entered the house, she showed us to the living room and we sat down on the sofa.

“To put it bluntly, Eina is dead.”

What did she...?

I tried to ask her, but all that came out was a strangled sound of questioning.

The shock had closed up my throat, and I couldn't speak.

“Eina went up the hill at the back of our house during a storm five years ago and didn’t come back. She’s still missing. But there’s probably no hope after five years, and we’ve given up,” said her cousin with a grave expression.

I was just aghast, staring at her face.

“Thinking about it now, I think I did something I shouldn’t have. I was always treating her badly... But she was always just shutting herself away in her room, and just using other people’s things. Then there were the arguments with mama and papa, and the worry...”

She began to cry as she spoke.

Ruka-senpai said something to her, and Sakai gave some kind of response as well.

I watched it all dazedly, their voices sounding distant.

A single phrase was just repeating itself in my head.

Eina had died.

Died...

Died!

《But I’m scared. Scared to know my future. I mean... What if I’m dead after five years?》

I remembered Eina’s words.

“It can’t be true...” made its way from my mouth. “It can’t be true....!!”

Intermission 3 — Broken Spell

“You took my hotspot!!”

Onee-chan came storming into my room. I’d been found out. I returned it though...!

My mind went blank with fear. What would happen now?

“What are you doing, you freeloader!? Papa and Mama will be angry with this. I know you’ve been sneaking around with a smartphone,” she said, snatching the phone from my grip.

I tried my best to resist, but an elementary schooler is much weaker than a middle schooler.

She easily took it.

“Give it back, give it back!”

“Ehh, is it so important? Oh, what’s this? Chatting with a boy? You impudent elementary schooler.”

She looked at the screen and sneered.

“Give it back!”

I reached out for it, but she held it out of my reach because I was short.

“You want it back? Hmph, then maybe losing this will teach you a lesson.”
A chill ran down my spine.

What would she do?

The phone was the one connection between Shuu-san and I.

Was she going to break it?

“Please... I’m begging you... I’ll do whatever you say, so stop it,” I pleaded with her.

But she looked coldly at me and ran out of the room.

I chased after her.

But I couldn't catch her.

And then, she threw the phone onto the concrete of the entranceway right in front of me.

The phone cracked.

"Now you can't do anything bad," she practically spat.

I frantically picked it up.

It wouldn't turn on.

"Onee-chan, why...?" I looked up at her as I cradled the phone, glaring, "I hate you!!"

I ran outside.

"Oi, where are you going, it's dangerous!" She shouted from the door, but I ignored her. I didn't want to be here anymore.

I'd never come back. I'd go somewhere far away, where no one would find me.

With no umbrella to shield against the driving rain, I ran through the streets.

Chapter 4 — The Door to Eina

Part 1

“There was a large typhoon five years ago in October, Eina left the house in the evening and there was a landslide that day. You remember the landslide, right?”

“...I do.”

“And it’s the truth that a girl went missing then. It was in the newspaper. Judging by the context, it’s fairly likely that she was swallowed in the landslide.”

“I see.”

“Shuu, I really am sorry.”

Sakai was speaking apologetically to me, so I smiled.

“Thanks for everything. I’m... glad that I know about her. Thank you too, Senpai.”

“Shuu-kun...”

It looked like she couldn’t find the words. It was understandable.

I’d been excited too, saying things like ‘I wonder what kind of girl she is’ or ‘I want to talk about our favourite books when we meet’.

I felt bad about not paying attention to their feelings.

We had gone to the library after we had left her house and looked in the past newspapers to see if what Eina’s cousin said was the truth.

Even though it was her cousin telling us so it was obviously true, I hadn’t given up.

Sakai and Ruka-senpai had wordlessly helped me.

“I’m going home.”

“I’ll walk you back,” Ruka-senpai offered.

“Thank you, but it’s okay.”

“But...!”

“I want to be alone for a while. Sorry to be like this after dragging you all the way here,” I said, and she didn’t reply.

Alone, I made my way home. The moment we parted, tears filled my eyes.
Eina had died?

I couldn’t believe it, I didn’t *want* to believe it.

But it was the truth.

Humans died all too quickly. It was a surprising, merciless truth.

There was no such thing as miracles.

There was no such thing as mag-

“No, there is.”

I took out my phone. There was magic in my hand.

My phone was connected to five years in the past.

I could just tell Eina.

I’m sure I’d make it.

I opened the app and went to call her, but...

Eina’s name wasn’t on my friends list. Even searching her account name didn’t find her. My message history had vanished as well.

“That’s weird.”

I tore through the smartphone in a frenzy.

Through the app, and through my files too.

But I couldn't find any way to contact her.
The spell would break with the chimes of midnight.
Almost as if going to Eina's house was some sign, my phone was just a normal phone now.

Part 2

I don't really remember what happened after that. When I came to, I was still in Eina's town.

I was walking around places that were photographed on her posts.

Searching for a trace of her.

I kept up my futile search, wondering if she might still be alive.

The cherry tree was obviously not in bloom. The gym at her elementary school had also been repainted.

The town had gradually changed over the last five years.

Eina's posts had suddenly stopped five years ago. If the writer died, of course the posts would stop.

And then I arrived.

To the location of the landslide.

It was along an animal trail up the hillside. The trees had been knocked down as if the slope had been shaved. There were still traces of the movement. It had flowed on either side of the path.

It was a place that hadn't changed since five years ago.

If you were caught up in this, you wouldn't come back alive.

"Eina..." I called. She was under the ground here, because she hadn't gone home.

“Eina!”

It must have hurt and ached. How must it have felt? Or did it happen suddenly, without her knowing anything?

I clutched my phone.

The strap she had given me was attached to it.

The phone that was connected to Eina.

Why couldn’t I save her?

Why...?

Why!?

“Eina!!”

The silence returned to the hill after my cry, my voice echoing fruitlessly, and then...

Vzzzt, vzzzt.

My phone vibrated in my hand.

The vibration was loud enough that I could hear it.

Even as I asked myself who would call me at a time like this, I followed my habit and looked at the screen.

It was an unknown number.

A sense of unease settled in my chest.

Or maybe it was hope.

Even as I was terrified of the betrayal, even though I didn’t want to be hurt anymore, I couldn’t stop my hand from answering it.

The call connected.

《Shuu-san!?》

It was her lovely, beautiful soprano.

“Eina!?”

I couldn’t have misheard it, but I had to ask.

《No way! It worked!!》

She didn’t answer my question, but it was definitely Eina.

The pouring of the rain came through the speakers, she was in the rain.

I remembered her cousin saying how she had gone up the hills behind their house in the storm and a chill ran down my back.

“Eina, are you outside!? If you are, hurry back home!”

《Shuu-san? That’s you, right? I’m sorry, I can’t hear you.》

Beep.

The call cut off.

“Fuck, of all times.”

Gripping my phone, I looked down.

I called again.

“Connect, please...” but it showed no signs of doing so, “Eina! Please be safe, Eina!”

I couldn’t help but call her name.

And then, I noticed the strap on my phone shining faintly.

It was a mascot version of the demon I had played. I frowned and looked at it.

The light was getting brighter and brighter, until it was so strong I had trouble keeping my eyes open.

A flash engulfed me and in the next instant, the world went black.

*

There was a figure in front of me.

It was a small figure, like that of a girl.

She didn't even come up to my chest.

She was soaked, and water clung to her long hair.

She was clutching a phone in front of her chest.

“Shuu-san!”

The girl... shouted.

“Eina... is that you?”

“Yes! I’m Eina!”

As she spoke, the girl ran towards me and hugged me, clinging to me.

I enveloped her in my arms.



We held each other for a while amidst the beating rain and howling winds.

“Shuu-san, you’re warm...”

“Thank goodness, you’re alive.”

“Right, but how are you here?” She asked.

“I don’t know either, I shouted for you at the place the disaster happened, and I ended up here somehow. The disaster!” I separated from her slightly and looked into her eyes, “Eina, it’s not safe here, if you stay here, you’ll get caught in a landslide and die.”

“Eh...?”

“I went to meet you five years from now. Sorry, I broke my promise. But I couldn’t bear not meeting you. Then your cousin told me you’d died. That you’d gone missing in this typhoon.”

Eina paled and I gripped her hand.

“It’s okay,” I told her, as gently as I could, “I made it, I’ll save you.”

At that, Eina’s stiff expression relaxed slightly.

In my relief, I swore to myself that I would save her.

“Right. Let’s hurry up and-”

A rumble sounded, drowning out my voice. Reflexively, I pulled her behind me by her hand. Immediately afterwards, the ground gave way in front of me. A shudder ran down my spine.

“...That was close.” Eina’s voice trembled.

“Anyway, let’s go home... Eina, which way did you come?”

Shakily, she pointed at the area that had just been covered in mud.

“We can’t walk on that, it’s too dangerous.”

I went to call 119 to get help, but my phone was out of service.

Of course it was, it was from five years in the future.

“Eina, sorry but can you phone 119? Ask for help.”

“Onee-chan broke my phone,” she said apologetically as she showed it to me. It had massive cracks running through the screen and body, “It doesn’t turn on anymore, it was like a miracle that I could phone you earlier.”

That was what she had meant with things not going well between them, and I understood that because her phone had been broken, we couldn’t talk anymore.

“Okay, let’s climb down then.”

We began to walk through the rain. I was holding Eina’s left hand with my right. The rain made it cold and I would probably be in the same state sooner or later, I could feel my body temperature dropping. The sky was already dark, and the driving rain made visibility awful.

I hoped to find somewhere we could shelter from the rain and wait for help, but I couldn’t see anything that helpful.

Step by step, we carefully progressed.

To be honest, I was scared. Eina must have been too. Her small hand was gripping mine tightly, shaking, and not just from the cold.

However...

Over and over, I looked at her.

Over and over, she looked at me.

Each time we met each other’s gaze, we smiled slightly.

...The situation might be desperate.

But we weren't alone, we had met the person we each wanted to. That alone gave us courage.

And then...

"Eina! Look! Light!"

We came down onto a cliff-side road.

"We did it!"

We jumped into each other's arms without thinking. Now we just needed to follow the road down to the town.

Then, I noticed something approaching rapidly.

Bright white lights filled my vision for a moment. It was a truck. The noise of the rain made me not notice it until now. It was coming from around a curve too, so I hadn't seen the light.

When I noticed it, it was already really close. The driver hadn't noticed us at all, which was only natural with how bad the visibility was.

There was no time to think.

I held Eina and leapt backwards.

Somehow, I landed.

The truck passed right through the space we had just been.

"That was close... Thank you, Shuu-san."

"Yes, I'm glad you're sa-"

It was at that moment I lost my balance and took a step back.

However, there was nothing beneath my foot.

My world span, and the last thing I saw was Eina, with wide eyes, watching me fall.

I rolled down the cliff, hitting my body countless times, I couldn't even grit my teeth at the pain as I spun.

“Shuu-san!!”

I heard Eina's grief-filled cry from far away, and then I blacked out.



Part 3

I was face up, looking up at the sky.

“Where am... I?”

I muttered, my voice hoarse.

It wasn’t raining, I could see the sun through the gaps in the trees.

“Am I back... in my own time?”

I tried to get up, but I couldn’t move my body through the pain. I wouldn’t be able to get home on my own.

I’d have to call for help.

I forced my battered arm to search my pocket, but I couldn’t find my phone.

Then, I saw some rectangular thing in front of my hand.

“Haha, you’re kidding.”

I laughed. The phone was broken.

The display was shattered and the body twisted.

Only the demon strap was unscathed, so it was definitely my phone.

I couldn’t call for help.

I couldn’t move.

My body was freezing from the rain.

I see, I’m going to die.

Oddly enough, I didn’t feel despair.

It was Eina I was thinking of, I wondered if she managed to get home.

I'm sure she did, she was clever. She'd just go somewhere with people and then ask for help. It was a shame they wouldn't be able to find me, but that was unavoidable, I'd come back to five years in the future after all.

It wasn't a happily ever after, but it wasn't a bad ending either.

I'd been able to save Eina, that was enough.

I closed my eyes.

The next time I opened my eyes, the first thing I saw was a ceiling light.

It was an awfully low ceiling I thought.

The room itself was shaking.

“Where...”

“You’re in an ambulance,” a voice spoke from my side.

My heart clenched. It was the President. I realised she was holding my hand when I felt her warmth.

“...You saved me? Why?”

“Don’t speak for now.”

Just as she said, I closed my mouth, my eyelids grew heavy, and I once more lost consciousness.

When I came to, I was in a hospital, lying on a bed and completely covered in bandages. My entire body ached.

“Shuu! Thank goodness...!” My mother peered into my face and let out a breath of relief. My father was behind her, “Thank Minekawa-san.”

Because it was my mother speaking, it took me a little while to realise she meant the President when she said Minekawa.

“What do you mean... thank?”

“Minekawa-san called for help, she saved you,” my father told me.

“Apparently she heard you went to where that landslide happened and she hadn’t heard from you, so she thought something must have happened. And then she found that you’d fallen down the cliff and weren’t moving and called for help.”

I mentally questioned his explanation.

How did she know I was there? Did she hear from Ruka-senpai or Sakai?

No, I hadn’t said anything to them.

Besides, I hadn’t contacted her. In the first place, I didn’t know her phone number.

She had lied.

But why?

The next day, many people came to visit me.

The first was Sakai, skipping school. For a moment I was touched that he was so worried about me, but then:

“So you fell down a cliff? What was it like, did it hurt?”

Sakai entered reporter mode. I was half angry at that being his reason, and half darkly amused.

“Obviously it hurt.”

“Tell me everything you can. I’ll write an article.”

“I don’t remember much. It was sudden, and I lost consciousness quickly.”

“Ah, that’s a shame. Well, I’m glad you’re safe.”

He never changes.

The next to visit was Ruka-senpai. It looked like she’d come right after school.

“Shuu-kuuuuuuun, you’re aliiiiiive!”

She cried out as soon as she saw me.

“I’m sorry for worrying you.”

“It’s fine as long as you’re safe... Umm, I’m going to ask something strange,” she wiped her tears and looked seriously at me, “you didn’t jump, did you?”

Apparently, she thought I’d tried to kill myself.

“No! It was a complete accident!”

“I’m glad. No thinking of things like that, okay?”

“It’s okay, I’m not that poor in the head.”

I did my best to smile and hide my unease. I thought I’d seen Eina, but was that a dream? If I just fell down the cliff in reality...

It seemed all too likely.

But I soon thought again, it couldn’t be, I could still feel her warmth, still hear her voice.

I could still see her eyes, still see *her*...

It was just the tendency of people in the hospital to think the worst. I had to go and look for her as soon as I was discharged.

Over the next days, the rest of my classmates and the other two club members visited. Only one person hadn't, the President.

Even though she was the one I wanted to speak with the most.

"Maybe she really does hate me..."

Just as I started to sadden myself with those thoughts, she appeared, on the fifth day since I was admitted.

"President!"

I shouted happily, having already given up.

"Has anyone come today?"

"No."

"Is anyone planning to? Like anyone from our class, or your club?"

"I haven't heard anything. They've already all visited I think."

"I see. That's fine then."

What was fine?

She pulled up a stool and sat next to the bed.

"I'm sorry, I wanted to come sooner, but someone else was always here, so I couldn't speak with you properly. You've got something to ask me, don't you, literature club?"

"Yeah, I didn't tell anyone where I was going, you shouldn't have known, so how did you?"

"Because you told me, five years ago, right? That you shouted for me there and ended up with me somehow."

Five years ago?

Called for her?

“It can’t be...”

“That’s right,” she gave a small smile, “I’m Eina.”

She proclaimed in her beautiful soprano.

I just stared at her with my eyes wide open in mute shock.



Part 4

“When you fell from the cliff, I saw you disappear, Shuu-san,” the President, Eina, spoke to me like she always did, using my name rather than ‘literature club’ and politely, “you really had vanished. The rain eased off a bit so I went to check just in case, and you weren’t there, so I thought you had gone back to your own time.”

The President, usually like a bare blade, now seemed to be a normal girl. It felt like an illusion, but her girly side was surprisingly cute, and made me feel nice as well.

“I was worried though. I didn’t know if you’d gone to the same place, or if you’d fallen down the cliff there as well. If you hadn’t told anyone, you wouldn’t be found, so I decided to contact you on that day.”

“You remembered for five years?”

“Yes, I didn’t forget it for even a second.”

Eina nodded smoothly, and I wanted to ask her something in my surprise, to ask if she thought of me that much.

“So I tried to use the class network to get in contact with you, but like I thought, I couldn’t...” she continued her explanation as I remained silent, “so I went to the cliff, found you, and called for help.”

“So that’s what happened... You saved my life, Eina, thank you so much.”

“Ehehe,” she chuckled shyly.

“But if you hadn’t come that day, I would have been caught in that landslide. Thank you very much.” She dipped her head at me.

“Wait a minute though, your name isn’t Yokota Yukino, it’s Minekawa Yukino…? Was it not your house we found?”

“That was my aunt and uncle’s house. I told you before, didn’t I? My parents died and I moved to live with my mother’s sister and her husband.”

I had a feeling I’d heard that.

“Huh? But don’t you live in an orphanage?”

The circumstances were complicated and I was puzzled over it.

“In the end, our relationship got too bad and I went into the orphanage. Or rather, I wanted to and stopped trying to bear with it. Because I’d managed to survive, I went to look for a place where I could live my own way. I didn’t have any other caretaker because my parents had died, so I was allowed to after a little investigation.”

“I see…”

“A lot changes in five years.”

We nodded fervently to each other. I felt like everything had been solved, but I noticed something big.

“Wait, if you’re Eina, then you were always alive, right? But the Yokota girl, your cousin, said you died?”

“Ahh, that’s….” She faltered for some reason. And then she bowed deeply.
“I’m so sorry! I had Onee-chan lie to you!”

“Huh!? Lie!?”

“You said five years ago during the disaster, didn’t you? You told me you’d heard from her that I went missing and died during the typhoon.”

“I did.”

“If she had said ‘Eina is Minekawa Yukino’, you wouldn’t have gone back in time, would you? But if you hadn’t, I probably would have died. I didn’t want that, I wanted to meet you, so I had Onee-chan help me.”

“R-right.”

I was too happy that she said she wanted to meet me, and I didn’t care about the lie.

“Well, I’m happy that I could save you, so there’s no problem.”

“Thank you.”

“I thought you didn’t get on well though?” I asked, and Eina gave a tight smile.

“At the time... we didn’t, it was awful. But when we started to live apart, I came to understand that she didn’t just want to bully me, she was thinking about a lot of things in her own way, and she’s much kinder now, so she’s reflected on it.”

I remembered her cousin’s words.

“I was always treating her badly... But she was always just shutting herself away in her room, and just using other people’s things. Then there were the arguments with Mama and Papa, and the worry...”

That wasn’t simple acting, she really was talking about what had happened back then, I thought as my heart warmed.

Lots of things changed in five years.

“Ahh, but I really am glad everything went well,” Eina let out with a sudden sigh, it was nice to see a gap in the President’s usually perfect facade,

“if I’d been found out, that would have been the end of everything, so I was really terrified.”

“I see, when I knew that you were Eina, I would have known you were alive, and not gone back in time,” Then Eina would have been caught up in the landslide and died. From that perspective, she was always fighting for her life, “Was it tough? Pretending you didn’t know me?”

However, she didn’t look sad, and just pouted a little.

“Do you remember the first time we met? I doubt you do.”

“I do, in the library, right?”

Eina’s breath caught in shock.

“That’s right, I spoke too familiarly with you, right? I reflected on that and realised it’d all be over if we were together, so I didn’t join the literature club, and even when we ended up in the same class, I kept as distant as possible.”

“So that’s why you were so cold? I thought you hated me.”

“I could never hate you!”

“R-really...?” I couldn’t quite speak through the happiness, but her cold behaviour went through my head and I couldn’t immediately believe it. “But you were going to mercilessly take our clubroom...”

“I had to act like a demon to do that, it was really hard! I couldn’t show favouritism!”

“And you always looked so unhappy when you were with me.”

“That was because I was doing my best to contain my expression. Just talking with you made me want to smile so I was nervous I’d get found out...”

She began to turn red. I might have as well.

We looked at each other for a while.

“Say, Eina.”

“Umm, Shuu-san...”

We both paused at our synchronicity before laughing together.

“I’ll go first then...” she began, but I talked over her.

“Sorry, the guy should go first in this situation.”

“...Okay.”

Eina somewhat ceremoniously adjusted herself on the stool.

“Eina...” I took a deep breath and said, “I love you. I actually have since I first met you, when I met you in the library as Minekawa Yukino that is. I thought you hated me so when Eina messaged me I let you leave my mind, but I always have.”

Her face had gone bright red, but her gaze didn’t leave mine. Tears were shining in her eyes.

“Now that I know that Eina and Minekawa Yukino are both the same person and the one I love, I’m really happy. Because I know I ended up falling for the same person, and that I love the same person.”

“I’ve...” she began shakily, “I’ve always loved you, Shuu-san. Five years ago, after that, and even now! Always...”

As she spoke, she moved closer to me. I put my arms around her and held her.

“This isn’t a dream, right?”

“I wondered too, but it’s not. We’re really together,” she said, smiling in my arms, making me smile as well.

I thought we were so far apart, but she was actually right next to me...

She was right in front of my eyes at this very moment. There was so much I wanted to talk to her about. So many places I wanted to go together.

It might be fun to do a book exchange.

But for now, I just held her in my arms, revelling in the happiness I felt from having her at my side.

The End.



Afterword

I've gotten a lot of spam messages, and at one point I got a great deal of them in a short amount of time. I lump them all together as spam mail, but there really were many kinds.

For example:

Would you like 100,000,000 yen? Click this link to find out more.

It would tempt you to click the link, then when you did, ask for your bank account details and credit card number. You might get spam, but never click those links.

Or perhaps something like this from a woman's name.

Thanks for your email address [smiley face].

They might pressure you to reply, you'd talk for a while and then get invited to a dating site.

Or maybe a fake bill:

You have been charged a usage fee. Click here.

I see those and think "Huh? I'm not falling for that. I won't click the links, and I'm not replying."

And then just delete the message.

And then one day I wondered.

"Then what kind of message would I want to reply to?"

I thought endlessly over it.

I don't really have any interest in the messages from girls wanting to meet you. And getting money just sounds too good to be true. I wanted it to feel more like it was from a person...

And then suddenly, the name Eina came into my mind. She likes novels, she has a bright personality, but she's a little odd so she doesn't have any friends. Because of that, she's alone and starts writing on her phone like you'd talk to the wall...

If you got a message like 'It's all over. I want to die.' From a girl like that, you'd reply, wouldn't you?

Our generation communicates by text messages, but nowadays, social networking apps have chat functions so that built the setting as it is.

Before I knew it, I'd thought up the plot, so I tried writing it and thankfully managed to get it published. Thank you, spam mail.

With the advent of mobile phones, we've become able to communicate with our loved ones even if we separate, but that can't divert from the loneliness of not being able to meet. I wrote with those heartbreak feelings in mind, so I hope you enjoyed it.

Now, my final thanks:

Head editor Shouji Satoshi-san, thank you for all your help, your quick, pertinent advice allowed me to create this book, thank you very much.

Miwano Rag-san, my illustrator. Thank you for your wonderful illustrations. I like them all, but I particularly like the mysterious air of the cover.

I also give my thanks to everyone involved with the publishing of this book.

I give my greatest thanks to you, who picked up my book. A book is complete when it is read, thank you very much.

And so, I hope we can meet again.

Respectfully yours, Takahashi Bisui, May 2018

Credits

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Illustrator: Miwano Rag

Translator: MPT

Editors: Lass Isolet and Yuuki

Illustration Editors: Flashkirby99, Frozen, and MPT

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